A Study in Magic

By: Books of Change

When Professor McGonagall went to visit Harry Watson, son of Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, to deliver his Hogwarts letter, she was in the mindset of performing a familiar if stressful annual routine. Consequently, she was not prepared to find Harry Potter at 221B Baker Street. BBC Sherlock HP crossover AU

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Introduction
The Unexpected Discovery
Dinner in Baker Street
Dropping Bridgets in Diagon Alley
The Curious Magic in 221B
Ron and the Philosopher's Stone
Harry and the Fall Full of Debacle
Hermione and the Troll Incident
The Perils of Deduction
Desires of the Heart
Full Cups of Distress
Pride and Impertinence
Magic Meets the Met
Security and Logic in Fairy Land
Neville and the Man with Two Faces
Magic Meets the Met Again
Introduction to Magic 101
Life Among Muggles
He Solves Crimes and I Blog About It
Braving the Alley
Substitution and Scandal
Teaching Lessons
Wand Woes
Hidden History on a Wall
Canyons of the Mind
Unliving Memory
The Grandmaster
A Scandal in Hogwarts

Secrets, Silence and Slytherin
Family Matters
Fissures
Uncomfortable Truths
Error in Expectations
Filling In
Turns, Trials and Trouble
The Heart of the Matter
Consequences of Ideas
The Glitch
Shifts over Christmas
Digging Deeper into Alarm
Caring Inspiration
A Sense of Timing
About Human Nature
The Invitation
The Importance of Meaning
Strange Family Relations
For Life
Multitudes of Mayhem
Many Unexpected Discoveries
Pregnant Waiting
The Madman Returns
A Dissident View
Rude Quickening
A Bucket of First Tasks
Life Crises
Turning Point
Desirable Delays
The First Filming
Unforeseen Tasks
Respites in Disguise

The Yule Ball
Choices
A Quiet Convergence
Luminous Oversight
Making a Bow
Cross Examination
Clue Overlooked
The Most Tragic Phrase
The Dark Lord Questions
Mind Games
Plan of Attack
The Ministry Maneuvers
A Most Valuable Institution
An Unhappy Announcement
The Ministry's Scoop
Countdown
Pulling the Plug
Catastrophe in the Ministry
How To Catch A Dark Lord
Unspoken Truth
Fallen
What You See Is Not What You Get
The Hidden Plan

The Unexpected Discovery

A Study in Magic

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Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter One: The Unexpected Discovery

When Professor Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, travelled to London to interview Harry Watson, prospective wizard student, she was in the mindset of performing a very familiar if stressful annual routine. Consequently she was unprepared for the surprise that was waiting behind the doors of 221B Baker Street. Namely, a little black haired boy who had a hauntingly familiar face and green eyes, and a thin lightning shaped scar on his forehead. So shocked was she at the sight of him, she turned around, dashed into to nearest hidden corner and vanished, leaving a confused Harry standing behind the threshold.

Ten minutes later she barged into the office of Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of aforementioned Hogwarts School of etc., etc., without knocking. Dumbledore stared in quiet astonishment as the normally prim and proper McGonagall stood heaving before his desk with her square glasses askew, black summer jacket only half buttoned, white silk blouse crumpled, and still wearing a knee-length black pencil skirt.

"Yes Minerva?" Dumbledore asked.

McGonagall planted both hands on the desk, as if to brace herself.

" *Albus*… !" she started.

She didn't continue. Dumbledore studied her for a moment, then conjured a silver tray of tea and crumpets, poured a cup and offered it to the distressed Deputy Headmistress. She drained it in one go. Afterwards, McGonagall looked visibly more composed.

"Well, then," Dumbledore said. "Please take a seat. Then tell me how I can help you."

"I'm sorry, Albus," McGonagall said as she sat down. She took a deep breath. "Well, as you know, I've been making rounds to visit this year's prospective Muggle-born students. Today I went to London. I met Mr. Dean Thomas and Miss Hermione Granger and delivered their letters. Then I went to visit Mr. Harry Watson."

She paused. Dumbledore nodded in encouragement.

"Young Mr. Watson opened the door for me. And… Albus, I couldn't believe my eyes. In fact, I'm inclined to believe I was seeing things. But the boy was a spitting image of James Potter, and… *he had Harry Potter's scar* ."

Silence reigned in the office for a span of a minute, during which Dumbledore looked absolutely gobsmacked.

"… Are you sure?" he whispered at length.

"Yes. No. *I don't know!* I left before I could properly confirm, but that's what I saw."

Dumbledore ran a hand over his moustache. The hand was not quite steady and his eyes held a different light from his normal twinkle.

"After all this time," he whispered. "After all that effort to locate him, could this be…?"

Then abruptly he stood up.

"We have no time to lose!" said Dumbledore as he walked briskly around his desk. "Thank you for alerting me immediately. I only

hope Harry was not so alarmed that he won't speak to us again. You still have the letter?"

"Of course."

"Then let us go deliver it, you and I. Now please excuse me, I must go and dress more appropriately!"

Another ten minutes later Dumbledore and McGonagall noiselessly appeared in Baker Street Station, the former dressed in a Victorian three-piece suit of plum velvet and the latter in her formal black suit and white blouse (no longer creased). In less than five minutes, they made it to 221B. Dumbledore firmly knocked the door.

A well-aged woman dressed in a smart purple dress opened the door this time. She blinked, as if trying to dispel the illusion that was Dumbledore and McGonagall. Dumbledore made a polite, most proper bow.

"Good afternoon, Madam," he said. "My name is Albus Dumbledore. My colleague and I have an appointment with Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson."

The woman blinked again. Then she beamed at the two.

"Oh, you must be the school officials John was talking about this morning!" she said, "Come in, come in!"

She beckoned them inside the flat, led them upstairs and knocked the first door to appear directly in front of her.

"Yoo-hoo! Sherlock, John, you have visitors!"

She opened the door without further ado. Beyond the door was a spacious yet cluttered sitting room. There were two tall windows on the opposite side, filtering in the last dregs of daylight. Between the windows stood a polished wooden table buried underneath stacks of books, magazines and other paper paraphernalia. High above the table hung a cow's skull wearing headphones. A couple of standing lamps and a battered grey leather couch framed the wall on the

right, and two built-in and overburdened bookshelves framed the wall on the left. Between the built-in bookshelves were a mirror and a mantelpiece. A human skull graced the closer end of the mantelpiece, and a jack-knife pinned a small pile of mail to its wooden surface. Beneath the mantelpiece was a proper fireplace, not one of those Muggle contraptions that generated heat but no real flame. In front of the fireplace were two armchairs, one made of red fabric with a green tartan blanket thrown on top, and the other had leather seats and a metal chrome frame. The armchairs were already occupied by two people- Sherlock and John, presumably. The tow-haired one wearing an oatmeal jumper and blue jeans was sitting in the red chair, and the young man with black curly hair wearing a silk shirt of deep purple and a dark suit of modern cut sat on the leather chair. The blue-grey eyes of the latter scrutinized the visitors. The former turned around and started at the sight of Dumbledore.

"Hello, Mrs. Hudson," said the tow-haired one, after a beat and standing up. "And hello. I'm John. John Watson."

Dumbledore shook the proffered hand.

"How do you do, John? I am Professor Albus Dumbledore. This is my colleague, Professor McGonagall."

" *Oh* . Uh, Hello," John shook hands with McGonagall. "Please take a seat. You can take my chair. Or the couch."

They did so, Dumbledore taking the vacated red armchair and McGonagall taking a seat at the couch. John relocated to the table between the windows and leaned against it, arms crossed. Mrs. Hudson went away, muttering something about dinner, just this once, she wasn't their housekeeper. Sherlock stayed where he was, silent and unmoving, as he watched the teachers' every move through unblinking eyes.

"Well, John, if you don't mind, I shall proceed without any further ado," Dumbledore started. "As mentioned in the letter, my colleague and I are here to offer Harry a place at my school. We believe Harry has the necessary gifts-"

"Is it normal for the headmaster to make these visitations?" Sherlock interrupted.

John frowned at Sherlock. Dumbledore just looked at him keenly.

"Normally, no. But we have been faculty long enough to have taught your age peers-Harry's parents generation, in other words."

Comprehension dawned on John's face.

"Harry looks like one of your old students, doesn't he?"

"Yes," said McGonagall, "I must apologise for my earlier behaviour, Dr. Watson, but when I came here twenty minutes ago, I was operating under the impression that Mr. Potter and his family were missing, presumed dead."

John nodded in understanding. "Must have been spooky."

"I hope he wasn't too alarmed."

"Harry's okay. He was more confused than anything."

Dumbledore smiled in a grandfatherly manner before opening his mouth to continue. But he was interrupted again.

"This is a waste of time," Sherlock growled. "You're not here to present. You're here to *convince* . So cut the theatrics and do what you really meant to do."

Dumbledore closed his mouth and regarded Sherlock thoughtfully. John looked torn between wanting to apologise for Sherlock, explain his behaviour or berate him.

"I see you are an uncommonly intelligent man," said Dumbledore calmly. "What do you think I'm really here for?"

Sherlock smirked at the implied challenge and partial confirmation.

"The question isn't *what* . The question is *who* . Who are you exactly? You're the headmaster of a boarding school, and Professor McGonagall is your deputy. So far, obvious. The school in which you

work in uses an old building. Medieval castle, probably, definitely made of stone and marble and has a large grass courtyard. You haven't just taught my generation. You also taught my parents' generation at the very least. Both of you wear robes and broad-brim hats regularly and use quills instead of pens, parchment instead of paper. But the key item that identifies who and what you are is in your jacket pocket; the instrument through which you are able to, for the lack of better word, perform spells such as ' *stupify* ' and ' *obliviate* '."

Dumbledore beamed at Sherlock, while McGonagall openly gaped at him. John went from regarding Dumbledore uneasily to giving Sherlock exasperated looks.

"Your school is specifically designed for training individuals who have the power to perform 'spells'. But that's not all. You don't just train children and send them back. No, your school acts as a gateway, so that a child possessing this power can enter a hidden society entirely made up of people possessing this power. Your job is to convince those not born in the society to join it-by offering a place in your school."

Dumbledore's smile grew wider. "Anything else?"

"You are a prominent man in your world," said Sherlock, "Ever since the late 19th century, if I'm not mistaken, but you've eschewed a more public role. As for this visit," he briefly eyed John. "Harry's reintegration to your world is a task so vital that one as prominent as you came here in person, and you will not leave until you've convinced us to leave Harry's future in your hands."

And with that Sherlock leaned back, palms together under his chin, and fixing Dumbledore's twinkling blue eyes with his own pale-coloured ones.

"You know," Dumbledore said, after the brief staring contest. "When one lives as long as I do, and have done this interview as many times as I have, one starts to think there is no possible permutation one hasn't experienced."

Sherlock nodded once, full of impatience. Dumbledore smiled at him

benignly.

"As you've gathered, Mr. Holmes, I'm the headmaster of a very special school. This school, Hogwarts, teaches young people how to harness and control a power which we call Magic."

Sherlock didn't even blink at the announcement that would normally lead to accusations of insanity or worse.

"I presume you call yourselves wizards and witches," he said.

"Yes," Dumbledore said. "And Harry is a wizard."

"Born or made?"

"Born. Magic is something either one has or does not have, though there are differences in talent for those who do."

"Pity," said Sherlock. Then he shrugged dismissively. "Did I get anything wrong?"

"I flatter myself for being rather well known," Dumbledore said (McGonagall coughed at this outrageous understatement). "Undoubtedly Harry will find the reasons should he consent to go to Hogwarts, which, as you said, is a boarding school situated in a castle up in Scotland. I assume you figured out the existence of the grounds from the grass stains on Professor McGonagall's shoes. I have taught two generations of Potters." He turned to look at John, who was doing a great job appearing like inconspicuous furniture. "Harry took your name after the adoption?"

John nodded. "He didn't like the sound of Harry Holmes."

Dumbledore chuckled.

"I also gather I am not your first encounter with Magic folk."

"You'd be the sixth," Sherlock confirmed. "For John. Second for me."

Dumbledore nodded. "And I suppose you guessed the hidden existence of our world from these encounters and the conspicuous lack of public knowledge of thereof."

"I never guess," said Sherlock.

"He simply observes," John explained, full of fond exasperation, "Then deduces."

"Ah," said Dumbledore, "My apologies. So how did you *deduce* the parchment and quills and robes, and that I've been around for more than a century, Mr. Holmes?"

"Your clothes; the cut and fabric aren't replicas, they're authentic and directly from the period. You're an educator and a bachelor. You won't waste money on a restoration, so it's well kept genuine. Could have been inherited, but it's tailored to fit your frame. Unlikely you've altered it since its purchase, certainly not through normal means, so you've bought for yourself when it was current. The quills are easy, you know it already."

"My hands?"

"The calluses on your fingers and the ink marks suggest frequent use of a narrow instrument dipped in ink, not the usual pen and pencil. The letter Professor McGonagall has in her pocket is made of parchment, not paper. Legends of witches and wizards generally end around the medieval ages, Renaissance at most. Ergo, your world went into hiding around that period, and the seclusion was so complete that the use of quill and parchment continued, as well as robes, which were apparel of choice for academia."

Dumbledore shook his head, chuckling.

"You are truly one of a kind, Mr. Holmes," he said. "I must guard myself against you if I wish to keep the Statute of Secrecy."

"Spot on then," Sherlock probed, looking rather smug.

"All except for the robes," said Dumbledore. "It's not just limited to Academia, but most wizards and witches."

Sherlock looked put-out. " *Always* something," he muttered.

"Hang on, you mean Harry being important enough for you to come in person is true?" John exclaimed.

"Yes," Dumbledore replied. "But I think it would be best if Harry were here to hear that part of the story."

"I'll get him," said Sherlock, much to John's apparent surprise. He leaped out of his chair and strode out of the sitting room. The remaining three listened to the sound of his trek upstairs.

"Harry!" they eventually heard him shout. "Good news! You're going to a school of *Magic* !"

John twitched in wordless outrage. After sputtering around on the spot, unable to articulate, John slumped.

"This happens often?" Dumbledore asked sympathetically.

"All the time," John muttered. "Sorry about him. He's always like that."

"We have all sorts around the Magical world, too, though none so brilliant," Dumbledore remarked.

"You're no slouch yourself," John demurred, "People normally don't react to him like you."

"How do people normally react?"

"They tell him to piss off."

Dumbledore was still laughing when Sherlock came back, a familiar-looking little boy in tow.

While Albus and Mr. Holmes had their intellectual/verbal sparring match, Minerva privately worried about the sort of influence Mr. Holmes had on poor Harry. James and Lily had been bright, but no where near like Sherlock Holmes. What if the man cowed Harry's fledgling intellect by his sheer brilliance?

When she saw Harry standing uncertainly at the door, kneading his shirt between his hands and looking warily about, her worst fears appeared to have been justified.

Then Dr. Watson walked straight to Harry, arms swinging like a marching solider. Harry's face lit up and relaxed as John drew near and wrapped an arm around him. As Mr. Holmes reclaimed his seat, Dr. Watson pushed the unoccupied chair right next to the sitting room door closer to the circle of people, directed Harry to sit in it, and stood to Harry's right, left arm loosely draped across the boy's narrow shoulders.

Albus watched this little interlude with twinkling eyes.

"Hello, Harry," said Albus gently. "It's good to see you. I'm Albus Dumbledore."

Minerva took a good look at Harry as Albus talked to the boy. He looked so much James, and yet not. He was small and thin; much smaller than she ever remembered James being, and certainly on the tiny end of her personal size scale for first years. His face was paler and narrower, the cheek bones more prominent, and his green eyes behind the wire-frame glasses seemed too large for his face. Besides the eyes, which were all Lily, she saw hints of Harry's mother on his nose and chin. His black hair was all James: growing in all directions, though the mess was somewhat mitigated due to its length. It was short-cropped, just like Dr. Watson's. But what struck her most was the deep solemnity bordering on sadness in his expression, and the grave eyes that showed glimpses of a soul too old for a child to house.

Speaking of graveness, Albus turned exactly that.

"So your aunt didn't tell you anything about Hogwarts or your parents."

"No. Not really. She told me that they died in a car crash, but Sherlock said she was lying since there aren't any reports of car crashes they could've died in."

Albus shook his head sadly.

"Indeed. Well, I'm afraid Mr. Holmes' deductions are correct. Your parents didn't die in a car crash. They were killed by a very evil man. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Harry, did you know that you are a

wizard?"

Harry goggled at the Headmaster.

" *What* ?"

Minerva smiled faintly at the familiar reaction. This was her favourite part of the interview; making known to the Muggle-born child what they really were.

As it turned out, it didn't take much to convince Harry of the existence of Magic and witches and wizards. Minerva wasn't surprised. She didn't think someone of Mr. Holmes's calibre and temperament would've failed to notice Harry's bouts of accidental magic and not experiment. Indeed, Mr. Holmes confirmed her suspicions when he rattled off the things Harry had done and was wilfully able to do: summoning balls of light, re-growing hair, levitating objects and disappearing and reappearing from one place to another. Nothing too unusual-though the instinctive Apparition *was* an impressive amount of magic- until Mr. Holmes mentioned Harry's ability to talk to snakes.

"He can talk to snakes?" Albus repeated in mild surprise.

"Had a whole conversation with a Burmese python in the London Zoo," said Mr. Holmes. "Why? Is this unusual?"

"It is rare, but not unheard of," said Albus.

"Will it cause problems?" Dr. Watson asked.

Albus stroked his beard.

"The ability itself can be quite useful, but I think it is best kept under wraps. Snakes do not have good reputations, even in our world, and having the ability to speak to them will be regarded with suspicion."

Mr. Holmes narrowed his eyes at Albus and then at Minerva, clearly suspecting a great deal was left unsaid. Minerva tried very hard to look merely concerned and not completely shocked. To avoid Mr. Holmes's unsettling and (she was starting to suspect) all-seeing gaze, she turned her attention to Harry-a bit difficult, as Mr. Holmes

was quite the attention hog-and found the boy looking distinctly troubled.

Dr. Watson noticed it too. "What are you thinking, Harry?"

Harry started kneading the front of his shirt again, an oddly endearing and heartbreaking gesture.

"What *is* magic? I mean, are there good wizards and bad wizards, and good magic and bad magic?"

Minerva could derive several implications from this question. Mr. Holmes said Dr. Watson had no less than six encounters with wizards including theirs. She could easily imagine Harry being present for most if not all of them, judging from the way he latched onto the doctor. This past year all of the Obliviators and Aurors sent to locate the missing Harry Potter had either returned stunned or obliviated via spells cast from their own team-mate's wands. Seeing as Dr. Watson retained the memory of these encounters to tell the tale to Mr. Holmes, it was clear the doctor had emerged from all attempts at memory modification untouched by magic. While it was difficult to imagine one who looked so cuddly, mild and harmless putting up a (no doubt) vicious fight, it was obvious Dr. Watson *could* and *did* . These fights would have left a lasting and, unfortunately, negative impression of magic on Harry. At least, a negative impression of the sort of magic *other* magical folk did.

Minerva knew they had reached a critical point in Harry's magical education. What they said or did next would make or break it. What would Albus do?

Albus leaned forward, hands clasped together as if in prayer or supplication.

"Ah, Harry," he said. "You ask a very difficult question. I can't tell you what magic *is* because I don't know. Perhaps it was a gift. Perhaps it just *is* . Whatever it is, we have it and we use it. There are magics out there so dark one cannot even speak of them. There are also magics so good one can scarcely believe that they exist. There are also dark witches and wizards-of the like that killed your parents. But standing against them are people like your mother and father, who

died to protect you from the darkest wizard of this century. In many ways magic is like a hand: it can either stretch out and comfort, or curl up and make a fist. Ultimately it is our choices, I believe, that either makes us, or magic, good or evil."

Silence.

For a while Harry said nothing. He held onto Albus' gaze for a moment, and then looked down at his hands. His expression was thoughtful, but no longer troubled. Then he nodded to himself, as if Albus confirmed something private in his mind.

"So my mum and dad were killed by an evil wizard," said Harry.

"Yes," said Albus. "His name is Lord Voldemort." (Minerva flinched.) "And it is to him I now turn my narrative."

Harry listened with rapt attention as Albus gave him a brief (and age appropriate) summary of You-Know-Who's rise to power and his unexpected destruction. He flinched when Albus told him the manner of his parents' death, and looked troubled again when he learned about his part in You-Know-Who's demise and his consequent rise to fame.

"But I don't remember what I did," Harry protested. "There's no way I could've done anything. And I don't know anything about magic. I'll just disappoint everyone."

Here Minerva noted the barely noticeable grim satisfaction in Albus. This humble attitude was what Albus wanted to cultivate in Harry, and risked ten dark years of dubious Muggle care for it. Minerva had little doubt living in the magical world, aware of his fame, would've made lessons in humility very difficult, if not impossible, and she was glad Albus' gamble had brought the hoped-for winnings. But she was still uneasy. *What about the damages, Albus?* She thought. *I see them already. Was there really no other way?*

But now it was too late to speculate, and Minerva had a child to reassure.

"Don't worry Mr. Potter," she said briskly. "Whatever it is you can do

so far, knowingly or otherwise, does not change the fact that all magical children start at Hogwarts. You may worry that your Muggle upbringing puts you in a disadvantage, but neither familiarity nor long magical heritage translates to greater magical achievement. In fact," she looked at him pointedly. "Your mother, who was Muggle-born, was the most talented witch of her year."

That assured Harry a little, but not as much as Minerva hoped. She looked at Albus for additional support, but oddly, he remained silent.

"You don't have to go if you don't want to," said Dr. Watson, much to Minerva's dismay. "But don't make your decision based on what other people think. No one is worth *that* kind of honour."

Harry looked at the doctor for moment. Then a slow, small smile spread across his face. The sight took Minerva's breath away, and made her eyes well up in tears.

"Don't give anything the honour of ruining your life?" the boy said, as if he was quoting someone.

"Yeah," said Dr. Watson.

Harry smile broadened. Minerva sighed in relief. Clearly, whatever the faults of Mr. Sherlock Holmes (and she was very sure it covered an ocean), Dr. Watson's virtues more than made up for them.

Minerva had no time to savour the moment however.

"How exactly does magic work in terms of genetics?" Mr. Holmes asked (Minerva was no longer surprised at the man's capacity for rudeness.) "Obviously some children inherit them through non-magical parents. Is it recessive?"

"I'm surprised Harry is still famous," Dr. Watson remarked. "I mean, the whole vanquishing evil Dark Lord at the height of his powers is pretty darn fame worthy, yeah, but it's been *ten years* . Harry hasn't been around to fuel the rumour mill or the gutter press for that long." A pause. "Do you magic folk have gutter press?"

"I subscribe to the theory that Muggle-borns receive their magic through their Squib ancestors, non-magical children born from

magical parents," Albus said, answering in order. "And you must understand: Voldemort was active for no less than forty years, ten of which his influence was felt all across Magical Europe. So his destruction was an historic moment, and Harry's contribution was comparable to that of famous war heroes. And yes, John, we do have tabloids. In fact," he chuckled a bit, "most things in your world you will find its equivalent in ours. Except the Internet-I don't think we have that yet!"

"Oh," said Dr. Watson, taken aback. "Okay. So you don't have magical Internet? Shame."

"Would you be interested in inventing it, Harry?" Albus asked, moustache quivering.

"Oh, I don't know," Harry said shyly. "Sherlock tried to teach me computer programming, but… Well, I'm like John. Anything more than browsing and media and Word, something inside me just dies."

"Alas," said Albus, regretfully. "But there's still hope. The magical solution may be completely different after all."

Mr. Holmes asked a few more questions on the mechanics of magic, something Muggles always had trouble grasping. Dr. Watson, in the meantime, nudged Harry and gave him an inquiring look. Harry looked back, and Minerva saw the question brewing in his head. Watson made an encouraging gesture, to which Harry responded by looking nervously at Minerva and Albus, the headmaster in particular.

"Sir?" Harry finally asked. "Can you show us Magic?"

Albus smiled at him.

"What would you like to see, Harry?" he asked kindly.

"Can you-" Harry hesitated. "Can you fix John's shoulder?"

Albus scrutinized Harry, who reddened under his gaze, and then looked at Dr. Watson with raised eyebrows. Dr. Watson shrugged. Only then did Minerva realise the left shoulder was smaller than the right, and its movements were stiff and awkward.

"I got shot in Afghanistan," Dr. Watson explained. "Two years ago. Then last year I almost got blown up. Long story. It's not so bad that I can't pick things up, but I can't practice surgery anymore."

"Hmmm," said Albus thoughtfully. "Well, I'm not a healer, so I don't know how much I can do. But if the damage was only due to physical causes…"

He pulled out his wand. Harry held his breath as Albus pointed it at Dr. Watson. Mr. Holmes griped both armrests and looked ready to launch out of his chair. Dr. Watson, besides a clenched jaw, looked composed.

" *Vulnera Sanentur* ."

Dr. Watson's whole body trembled and the left shoulder subtly shifted, as if finding its rightful place. A few more repeats of the incantation and the entire arm settled and grew firm and balanced. Once the tremors subsided, Dr. Watson gingerly lifted the whole limb towards the heavens, flexing fingers and rolling the shoulder while at it.

"… Blimey," said Dr. Watson breathlessly. " *Blimey* ."

Mr. Holmes was at Dr. Watson's side at once. He grabbed the mended arm-carefully, Minerva noted-and moved it around, testing its mobility. The more he tested, the more amazed he became. But Harry was beside himself.

"Will I learn how to do that at Hogwarts!?" the boy asked, full of excitement.

"Perhaps not immediately," Albus replied, obviously warmed at Harry's first display of child-like enthusiasm, "And perhaps not directly. But you'll learn everything you need to know in order to get there."

Harry immediately turned to Dr. Watson, his green eyes sparkling.

" *John* ! John, can I go?!"

"Huh?" Dr. Watson look at him, rather awkwardly as Mr. Holmes

was attempting an arm lock. "Yeah, sure, if you want to. Go learn healing stuff. Or invent magical Internet. Whatever you like. Just come back and tell us all about it. Oh, for God's sake, Sherlock!" Dr. Watson slipped out of Mr. Holmes's grasp with an eel like twist. "STOP IT! You're embarrassing me!"

Mr. Holmes ceased his manhandling. Minerva noted his eyes were shining and he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Dinner!" he declared, as if it was a lovely gift he wished to bestow on a bemused Albus and an alarmed Minerva. "You must stay for dinner. Tonight. You want to know how we adopted Harry anyway."

"Er, Sherlock? We've been living off takeaway for the last three days, and I'm pretty sure we've cleaned out the last bit of it yesterday."

"Mrs. Hudson is bringing up French Onion and Italian bread. We can call for Chinese if we need more."

"Great. Kudos to Mrs. Hudson. Now what part of 'living off takeaway' and 'cleaned out' did you not get?"

"While your adoptive parents figure out the intricacies and feasibility of dinner," Albus said to Harry, as the dialogue between Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson degenerated into a fight, "why don't you read your Hogwarts letter?"

Final Notes: This is my second bit of fanfiction in years. (I've been writing, just not fanfic.) Please be gentle.

PSA: the latest installment of A Study In Magic, **LIARS FOR MAGIC**, is up. This is a fully transformed original work (but set in the ASIM universe). You can find links at: **booksofchange dot com**

I've taken down the PSA chapter since it's not really a chapter (hard to send alerts on this site).

ASIM WILL STAY UP for now. The ebooks are still available on my website.

Dinner in Baker Street

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. NOT SLASH! Appearances can and will be deceiving. Readers beware!

Chapter two: Dinner in Baker Street

Despite the argument that implied all attempts at dinner would only end in disaster, McGonagall and Dumbledore did end up staying for dinner. And what a marvelous dinner it was-delivered right on time via courier, the food and wine very delicious and high class. The only downside was it made Sherlock inexplicably grumpy, so much that he refused to eat a bite. John shrugged and tucked in, telling everyone else to do the same. As they dined, Dumbledore asked the inevitable question:

"So how did you end up adopting Harry?"

John and Sherlock looked at each other. Then they looked at Harry. The three conferred wordlessly for moment, exchanging many a mysterious glances and shakes of the head. In the end John sighed and nodded. Harry excused himself, saying that he wanted to take some of the excellent treacle tart to Mrs. Hudson. Once he was out of earshot, John began:

"Sherlock works as a consulting detective. He's good. Even the police consult him for their more difficult cases."

"They're constantly out of their depth and lack the sense to admit it," Sherlock interjected.

" *Sherlock*," John growled.

Sherlock looked petulantly away. After sending a withering glare at Sherlock, John continued:

"At some point, Sherlock caught the eye of his evil counterpart, a consulting criminal by the name of Jim Moriarty. Moriarty started baiting Sherlock with puzzles- mad intricate crimes with high stakes. If Sherlock didn't solve the puzzle on time, Moriarty would blow up his hostages. Literally. He kidnapped them, strapped them on bombs, made them speak for him at gunpoint and blew them up if they spoke out of turn. And yes, in case you're wondering, the man was insane."

"I judge from the past tense Mr. Moriarty is no longer in the land of living," said Dumbledore.

"He better not be."

"Ah," said Dumbledore delicately. "Pray continue."

"Well, they went back and forth like that," said John, "Moriarty cutting closer and Sherlock trying to one-up on him. He kidnapped me once and almost blew me up twice. Thank you so much for fixing my shoulder, by the way."

"You're welcome."

"Mmn. So around April last year Sherlock finally got the upper hand on Moriarty. We had to do mad crazy things to get there. You don't want to know what we had to do. But getting married was one of them."

Dumbledore choked on his water. McGonagall's fork clattered to the floor.

"… You married Mr. Holmes just to gain an upper hand over Moriarty?" McGonagall sputtered.

"Well, yeah," said John, sounding as if McGonagall and Dumbledore were the unreasonable ones. "Seriously, the death toll and number of other victims were getting out of hand so anything short of murder

was fair game. It worked too: kept Sherlock from dying in a matter of days instead of years."

Dumbledore opened and close his mouth. John and Sherlock, of course, didn't know what a privileged sight this was and just went ahead.

"Though we wouldn't have gotten married under normal circumstances, we don't regret the decision," Sherlock said matter-of-factly. "We're certainly not contemplating divorce. At least, I'm not." He eyed John.

"Nope," John confirmed.

Dumbledore eyed the two for a moment. Then he set his wineglass aside and started rubbing his temples as if their thoughts were physically hurting him.

"As much as the precise reason of your marriage raises my curiosity, I do not think I'm ready to hear the answer," said Dumbledore.

"Most people don't ever want to know," John agreed. "Anyway, by June the police and secret service were ready to arrest Moriarty and his criminal network. They did a good job, except Moriarty and his no. 2 escaped."

"Moriarty setup his final puzzle shortly thereafter," Sherlock said, suddenly solemn. "He kidnapped Harry and his relatives. Harry was his mouthpiece. The puzzle was this: ' *What is my dirty little secret* ?'"

A fork clattered to the floor once more. A horrified silence descended upon the cramped kitchen like mercury. The fridge in the corner hummed quietly in its wake.

"I know now the answer was magic," Sherlock said without inflection, "Not the garden variety abuse Harry was suffering, not the locking him in the cupboard under the stairs, and certainly not the misuse of child support funds. But whether I solved the puzzle or not didn't matter. *The puzzle was just a ruse.* Moriarty wanted to flush

us out in the open. John went to retrieve the hostages and I went to confront Moriarty-just as he planned. He was going to blow up John and Harry and the rest of the hostages as I watched. And he would've succeeded. Except Harry teleported away and appeared right on top of John, just outside the critical blast radius. That's how they survived."

"Harry saved my life," said John. "Though Harry seems to think I saved his. Anyway, after all that, adopting him was the least we could do."

"Of course you saved his life, you shielded him from the explosion," Sherlock growled. "In case you've forgotten again, John, the explosion left you officially dead for a whole minute whereas the worst Harry suffered was second degree burns."

"And like you just said, Sherlock, if Harry didn't magic himself out, there wouldn't have been anything of me left to scrap off the pavement," John retorted. "Anyway, that's how we adopted Harry. We didn't realize he was a wizard until a couple of adult wizards cursed Sherlock into a coma that lasted six days, but that's another story."

The rest of the evening would have been very subdued affair except John and Sherlock acted as if there was no reason to be subdued. Dumbledore pried more details on the 'garden variety abuse' Sherlock observed, and became absolutely still. At which point, John wondered how Harry ended up with the Dursleys and half-seriously threatened dire consequences for the one responsible.

"I'm sorry to say it was I," Dumbledore confessed as soon as John made the threat.

John stared at him. Sherlock, on the other hand, didn't look at all surprised, but looked terribly interested in observing John's reaction.

"What were your reasons?" John asked quietly.

"Voldemort was vanquished, but his followers were not,"

Dumbledore said. "The best protection I could give him was blood wards, forged through the shared blood between his mother and her sister. Then there was his upbringing to consider; should he grow up knowing fame or away from it all even if meant suffering?"

John continued to stare at Dumbledore. Dumbledore bowed his head.

"One day, I shall tell all this to Harry. I dare say he will be terribly angry with me. But I'd rather him alive and angry than the alternatives."

Another heavy silence descended upon the kitchen. For a moment, John stared at the ceiling.

"I was a soldier once," John said at length. "So I know war doesn't end when you kill off the leader. Sometimes it just makes things worse," A sigh, "And I know there's two ways to abuse a kid: either with too much pain or too much pleasure. You had to pick either. No matter how you think about it, Harry was going to suffer damage."

Another pause.

"Before we got married, Sherlock and I talked about what kind of kid we wanted, hypothetically speaking. I can't have kids-Afghanistan made sure of that-and Sherlock isn't interested in fathering any. But we both agreed we both wanted a kid who was kind and not afraid of suffering and hardship… A kid like Harry."

Dumbledore looked up. John gave him a rueful smile.

"I know you think we're insane. Everyone does. Half of the time I'm convinced Child Services will wise up on it and take Harry away. I can't say I'd blame them. But having Harry around was one of best things that happen to us, and it wouldn't have happened if you kept Harry in your world. So on my part, you have my thanks."

McGonagall came back from her trip to London late in the evening without the Headmaster. Professor Severus Snape, Potions Master of Hogwarts and the only teaching staff still present, inquired over

Dumbledore's whereabouts. Minerva unceremoniously dropped the news of her unintentional discovery of Harry Potter, a.k.a. Harry Watson, and told him Dumbledore was still in London confirming her discovery.

When Dumbledore returned to Hogwarts a good two hours later, Severus was ready to pounce.

"Well, headmaster? Is it true or was Minerva hallucinating?"

Dumbledore stared at Severus for a moment, his face holding an expression one may make after witnessing a Hippogriff with a long history of violence turn the other cheek after receiving an insult.

"The former," said Dumbledore. "Mr. Harry Watson is indeed Harry Potter, son of Lily. Harry legally changed his surname to Watson when his adoption to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson finalized a couple of months ago."

Severus had to sit down from the bombshell he just received. " *How* ?"

Dumbledore rattled off a very spectacular story featuring consulting criminals, consulting detectives, secret Muggle criminal organizations (which uncomfortably reminded Severus of the Death Eaters), high-stake puzzles, bombs and hostages. If it weren't for the fact *Dumbledore* was telling the tale, he would have disbelieved it outright.

"In short," said Severus when Dumbledore finished speaking. "Potter and his relatives were kidnapped by Muggle criminal mastermind Jim Moriarty. Moriarty threatened to blow them up. Holmes the Muggle detective-"

"Consulting detective."

"- *whatever*," Severus snarled. "Holmes solves Moriarty's puzzle. Watson saves Potter. Is that what happened?"

"More or less, yes."

"That doesn't explain why they adopted him."

"From what I understand, Dr. Watson was not only instrumental in saving Harry's life, but in nursing him back to health. As one can imagine, Harry was quite traumatized by this incident; during his extended stay at the hospital, Harry was plagued by nightmares and insomnia, and could sleep only if Dr. Watson held him close. By the time he was discharged, Dr. Watson and Harry were inseparable. It was Mr. Holmes who suggested that they adopt Harry, seeing as the boy had no other living relations and they would not have children of their own."

Severus stewed over this.

"Have you informed the Minister?"

"Not yet. I plan on doing so when I am confident in my ability to explain myself and the situation." Dumbledore chuckled. "Speaking of which, I stayed longer partly because I wanted to observe Harry."

Severus suspected that to be the case.

"What are your observations?"

"Harry is doing much better than expected. He doesn't react violently to sudden loud noises or explosions, nor does he have any significant mobility problems. Nevertheless, I plan on sending him to Poppy once he is sorted."

Severus nodded at the prudence of this action.

"Now the sobering news: Harry is prone to abrupt silences that at times last for days on end. He also has a tendency to seek precipices and sit dangerously close to the edge when left alone. The former I confirmed with my own eyes. The latter I did not observe in person, but I have Mr. Holmes' careful notes on the matter. Though the frequency of both behaviours have reduced significantly of late, we still must be mindful."

More extra work in other words, Severus thought sourly.

"What are you planning to do for Potter's protection? The blood wards are presumably gone."

"Oh, I have several ideas," Dumbledore said absently, before adding: "I expect to pay many visits to Baker Street this year."

"You mean to keep him where he is?" Severus asked in surprise. "Don't you think it would be more… *prudent* to move him to a Wizarding family?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "I doubt Dr. Watson will forfeit custody without a fight, not after going through the lengthy adoption process. And as I said before, Harry is very attached to Dr. Watson."

"Surely the problem isn't *that* daunting," Severus sneered. "Our Ministry, bungling though it may be, *does* have entire department dedicated to hiding our existence from Muggles. A few memory charms-"

"It won't do," Dumbledore said firmly. "Not only would we have to obliviate Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, we would have to obliviate Harry as well. Don't you realise how much we would have to make him forget? He must forget the circumstances of his relatives' deaths, the existence of his adoptive parents, and everything that happened from the kidnapping and thereafter. This is an entire year lost! Even if we can successfully remove all this without causing brain damage, it will not remove Harry's trauma. It will continue to manifest, but he will not remember the cause. Moreover, while I flatter myself an intelligent man, within five minutes I knew Mr. Holmes was in a class of his own. No," Dumbledore waved away the protest. "Believe me, making him forget will not stop him from figuring out what he'd forgotten. We cannot completely remove Harry's existence from their lives without compromising his ability to function normally in our world. No, it's not practical . More importantly, *it won ' t work* ."

"But the security concerns…"

"Then consider this if you will." Severus noted Dumbledore's expression took a slightly haunted edge. "Have you wondered why Dr. Watson was able to save Harry but not his relatives?"

"I was going to ask you."

"When Mr. Moriarty released his hostages' location, he did so to kill the doctor *and* the hostages. Harry and Dr. Watson only survived because Harry Apparated into Dr. Watson's arms before it was too late."

Severus closed his mouth with an audible click.

"Harry's magic saved him, but it didn't save his relatives," Dumbledore said softly. "Harry is in no way guilty. He was only nine. His magic could only react instinctively. Yet it haunts him. He said so himself: ' *I can ' t help but think … If my magic could save me, it could have saved them too.* '"

Severus felt the sour look on his face ebbed away like a receding tide, leaving blankness at its wake.

"In order for Harry to *live*, he must accept his magic," Dumbledore said. "To do otherwise will only lead to madness. When I heard what had happened, I feared the worst. But the boy I met today was one wary and haunted, but nevertheless eager to learn. For this we have Dr. Watson to thank. As a decorated medical officer forced to leave the battlefield after sustaining critical injuries, the doctor knows how to comfort a wounded survivor."

For a full minute the wizards stood in solemn silence. Severus chewed over the new bits of information he received with his head bowed. Dumbledore stared at the ceiling, the twinkling light that usually shown in his blue eyes dimming as he got lost in his own thoughts-or lost in a memory, one could not say.

"Well," said Dumbledore finally, "Have you any other questions?"

"Just one," said Severus. "You said *part* of the reason you stayed is because you wished to observe Potter. What was the other part?"

Dumbledore's smile took a mischievous turn that Severus learned to guard himself against.

"Shortly after my interview with Harry, I was immediately ushered to another interview with Mr. Mycroft Holmes, Mr. Sherlock's older brother. He wanted to know my intentions towards his brother and

family, you see."

Severus raised an eyebrow at this.

"You didn't refuse?"

"He didn't make refusal a viable option."

Severus raised his other eyebrow. "Are you saying he essentially *kidnapped* you?"

"Seeing as he hijacked all the security cameras in the vicinity to spy on me, and readied a black armoured car in front of 221B to escort me, and then drove me to an abandoned warehouse for the actual interview, yes, I think he did!"

Dumbledore laughed heartily as Severus struggled to contain equal parts of admiration and horror-not over the Headmaster, not really, he knew Dumbledore was perfectly capable of treating the casual kidnapping of his own person as unexpected bit of fun-but over the sheer *nerve* of Mycroft Holmes for pulling it off.

"Who *are* these people?" Severus wondered out loud.

"Who are they indeed?" Dumbledore said, still chuckling. "At least you can see my predicament. How am I supposed explain this to Cornelius? He'll never believe me!"

Final Notes : Thank you so much everyone for your kind reviews! The bit about Mycroft almost got deleted, but I just couldn't resist. Next stop: Diagon Alley!

Dropping Bridgets in Diagon Alley

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Chapter three: Dropping Bridgets in Diagon Alley

The morning after the unexpected discovery of Harry Potter, Dumbledore called a meeting for the Head of Houses, Hagrid and Madam Pomfrey. He first relayed the latest news relating to The-Boy-Who-Lived (majority attendee reaction was emotional and noisy). He then raised the necessity of adding new security measures to the castle in order to address Potter's myriad of psychological foibles, which apparently weren't limited to temporary muteness and suicidal attraction to precipices. Flitwick suggested that they cast invisible netting charms on the battlements and staircases, and warn the portraits and ghosts to keep an eye on the boy. Madam Pomfrey turned very grim when Dumbledore told them about the explosion, and Severus had a feeling she'd be ready to regrow all of Potter's limbs at the very least. Sprout suggested the boy be excused from flying lessons. McGonagall vetoed, saying that learning how to fly just might cure Potter of his unhealthy attraction to heights. Severus asked whether Potter's adoptive parents were aware of the existence of flying broomsticks. Dumbledore said negative. Blast the old man and his laid-back approach to student safety!

Once the new security protocols were agreed upon, Dumbledore asked Hagrid to chaperon Potter's trip to Diagon Alley since he had business at Gringotts as well. McGonagall insisted she accompany.

When asked why, she said:

"Because Mr. Holmes will no doubt be present and no hapless witch or wizard, let alone Hagrid, deserves something like Sherlock Holmes happening to them."

This brought another slew of questions from the alarmed staff. Severus was bemused; despite their efforts to civility, McGonagall and Dumbledore made the man sound like a highly intelligent monster Hagrid would love to keep as a pet.

In end the following scheme was concocted: All new Muggle-born students would be invited to a joint trip to Diagon Alley. The Head of Houses plus Hagrid would come as chaperons. That way all the Muggle-borns would be taken care of and the effects of Sherlock Holmes would be mitigated. It also gave an excuse for the teachers to meet Potter a month earlier, but no one mentioned this.

After all, Severus thought sourly, it would be unseemly for the esteemed Head of Houses to be absolutely tickled at the idea of meeting the famous Harry Potter.

On the morning of July 28th, the Hogwarts staff lined-up in front of Hogwarts' Floo-accessible fireplace. When Severus stepped out the Leaky Cauldron's fireside, he immediately noticed the small pub was already overrun with excited Muggle-borns and their nervous but equally excited Muggle parents. He swept his eyes over the group: a bushy-haired girl jabbering away at her parents, a tall black boy and his stout father, a curly-haired boy and his posh-looking mother, and a little black-haired boy clutching his tow-haired father/mother's shirt sleeve.

Harry Potter was notable in his absence.

Severus was cynically amused at his colleagues' effort to hide their disappointment. Severus himself was relieved. For years he planned on unleashing untoward and (he freely admitted in his own mind) barely justifiable hatred upon James Potter's Spawn. He *worked* on the hatred to make sure it wouldn't fade. Then Potter went missing

for more than a year, during which Severus was left in a limbo, his hatred disintegrating from the double blows of lost objective and crushing sense of failure only kept at bay due to the lack of conclusive evidence of Harry Potter's death. Only two days ago he'd learned Potter was alive and due to Hogwarts as previously scheduled, and Severus hadn't worked up his hatred to acceptable levels yet. But he was confident he'd be ready by start of term.

The fireside roared to life again, and McGonagall stepped out of the green flames.

"Ah, I see everyone is here. Good Morning, Misters Thomas, Doctors and Miss Granger, Mr. and Mrs. Finch-Fletchley…" McGonagall paused, "… Dr. and Mr. Watson."

The staff and Hagrid did a double take. So did Severus. He stared at the child Minerva addressed as Mr. Watson and immediately realized why he didn't recognise the boy at first. Minerva said Harry Potter was the splitting image of James Potter, but had Lily's eyes. Thus Severus had formed a mental image of Harry Potter based on his memories of James Potter as a first year (the eyes he studiously avoided thinking).

Harry Watson, a.k.a. Harry Potter, while in closer inspection *did* look like James Potter, lacked all of elder Potter's trademarks: the black hair was cut short, thus giving it less room for untidiness, the glasses were missing, and the infamous scar was hidden under a broad strip of flesh-coloured sticking plaster (making it look like the boy had a head-on collision with a doorpost). This and the fact an adult who didn't fit McGonagall's description of Sherlock Holmes accompanied the boy made Severus skim over him.

"Thank you, everyone, for coming despite the short notice," said McGonagall. "Let me introduce you to my colleagues, Professors Filius Flitwick, Pomona Sprout, and Severus Snape-" She indicated them in order, "-and finally Mr. Rubeus Hagrid, the Keeper of Keys and Grounds of Hogwarts. We shall be your guides for your trip to Diagon Alley. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask any one of us. Now please gather together, we will be entering Diagon Alley shortly."

Hagrid led the way to the walled courtyard (he had to be prodded first). Severus endured the expected squawks and twitterings when the enchanted brick wall yielded a hole that turned into the archway leading out to Diagon Alley. While the Muggle-born children and their parents exploded into paroxysm of delight, completely awed at their first encounter with an entirely magical shopping district, Severus carefully eavesdropped on the conversation between McGonagall and Dr. Watson.

"I didn't expect this," said McGonagall.

"Yeah, well, Sherlock thought there might be reporters," Dr. Watson said, sounding very distracted.

"Ah," McGonagall smiled. "I'm surprised he didn't come."

"Oh trust me, he wanted to. But his brother came to visit, so he had to stay in the flat."

"… There's another one?"

"Mmmhmm. He's just like him, except he prefers government work over freelance."

McGonagall shuddered. Severus, while not having any real idea what Sherlock Holmes was capable of, but having *some* idea of thereof for Mycroft Holmes, privately shuddered as well.

The first stop of the tour was Gringotts. Flitwick and Sprout secured a free goblin, who directed the parents to the Muggle currency exchange. McGonagall redirected Watson and Potter to Hagrid.

"Mr. Watson's birth parents had an account here," McGonagall explained. "Hagrid has the vault key."

"Huh?" Dr. Watson started. "Wait, hang on-"

But before Dr. Watson could say anything further, Hagrid descended upon Potter.

"I can't believe I'm seeing yeh, Harry!" howled Hagrid. "Thought I'd never see you again, and the las' time I saw yeh, you was only a

baby… !"

Dr. Watson stared as Hagrid babbled on. Perhaps it was Severus's imagination, but he had a distinct impression the doctor was sizing up Hagrid for a potential round of fisticuffs. Why Watson would even consider the possibility, Severus couldn't imagine. The doctor was both shorter and notably thinner than the average man, and Hagrid was easily double the height and three times the bulk of a big one.

"You knew his parents?" Dr. Watson asked when Hagrid finally calmed down.

"Yeah," Hagrid said, waterlogged and snotty, "Since they were kids. Nicer people yeh couldn't find…"

Severus turned away at this point. Then and there he decided to avoid Potter and Watson for the rest of the day.

After the money exchange (or in Potter's case, money withdrawal), they reconvened at the entrance of Gringotts. Since the group was too large to move together, it was decided one teacher would take charge of one family. Immediately Severus made a concentrated effort to look as unfriendly and unapproachable as possible. With three other teachers and Hagrid available, there'd be enough to go around even without him. Severus thought he'd succeeded when the families made beeline for the other teachers and Potter stayed close to a visibly shaky Hagrid.

He was wrong.

"Professor Snape?" Dr. Watson seemingly rematerialized before him (Severus commanded himself to not look startled). "Hello, I'm John Watson."

Severus contemplated the hand offered to him. At length he shook it, and was surprised at the strong grip.

"So where to?" asked Watson. "I saw the girl and her family head to the bookstore and the boys to a robe shop."

Severus considered this. "School equipment."

"Okay. Lead on then. Harry, come here."

Potter scampered over to Watson as Hagrid waved him off whilst leaning against one of Gringotts' outer columns, still trembling and weak-kneed. Severus could tell from this alone Poppy would have no reason to regrow Potter's limbs. The boy regarded Severus with quiet curiosity. Severus quickly tore his glance away from the green eyes.

Watson and Potter proved to be a quiet duo, respectful of Severus' disinclination to speak and comfortable with silence (Severus grudgingly appreciated this). Watson showed foresight in bringing a black wheeled suitcase and a good deal of bubble wrap when they went to purchase the telescope and brass scales. Potter was clearly intrigued by his surroundings, but examined the shop's merchandise through his eyes alone.

Watson asked his first question when they went to buy a cauldron.

"Why pewter?"

"Cost."

"Oh."

Both Watson and Potter remained quiet as they headed to the Apothecary. Again, Watson had the foresight to bring a Styrofoam box and several clear, airtight containers to stash the potions ingredients individually, thus preventing cross-contamination (Severus figured it was from his training as a Muggle healer). At Madam Malkin's, Watson hung back and stood next to Severus as the seamstress took charge of Potter.

"So Hagrid tells me you were year mates with Harry's mother and father," Watson started.

"If you took that to mean we were bosom-buddies, you are sadly mistaken," Severus said curtly.

Watson didn't take offence, much to Severus' disappointment.

"So you weren't friends with one or both?" he persisted.

"Why ask me? I'm sure my colleagues and Hagrid are more than willing to answer you," Severus sneered.

"Yeah, but they knew them as their *teachers*," said Watson patiently. "That's one perspective. You knew them as fellow students. That's another perspective. And if I just wanted the child-friendly sanitized version, I wouldn't be asking you."

Severus pondered this. It was clear now Watson cornered him specifically *because* he was a year mate to Potter's parents. But why ask at all? Was Watson looking for ammunition that would emotionally distance Potter from his dead parents? If this were case, to what end? The trip to Gringotts would have given Watson an idea how much money he could have access to as Potter's guardian. Was it money then? Severus considered Watson's attire. The light cream-coloured buttoned shirt and dark burgundy cardigan looked fairly new. They wouldn't have come from the posh shops the Finch-Fletchleys appeared to frequent, but its materials and stitches were of superior quality to the clothes the Thomases were wearing. The jeans looked well worn and well cared for. The same went to the tan shoes. Watson's eyes were clear and his hands were perfectly steady. Really, despite the rather fearsome-looking scar running up from the right collarbone to the right-hand corner of his jaw, Watson seem to embody the spirit of solid, hard-working and trustworthy British doctor. Thus Severus concluded Watson was motivated by neither money nor emotional manipulation. That left the unbelievable conclusion: Watson genuinely wanted to hear Severus' side of the story, knowing full well it wouldn't be pleasant.

"James Potter was mediocre and arrogant, a determined rule-breaker and a bully," Severus declared at length.

Watson blinked. "I'm guessing you two were enemies."

"Absolutely," Severus confirmed.

"Okay. Good thing Harry didn't get his personality then. What about his mum? Did you know her?"

Severus worked his face into a fierce scowl. It came out more like a grimace.

"No comment?" said Watson, discerning the reason for his silence far too correctly than Severus would have liked. "Well, I have a mental image of a woman who loved taking care of people and determined to do the right thing. This is based on what I know about Harry. But that brings the question how this lovely woman married the arrogant sod you just described to me."

Severus was actively using Occulmancy at this point, though Watson had no way of accessing his mind.

"Just out of curiosity, was James Potter an athlete?" Watson asked.

"He was."

"I knew it," Watson said with grim satisfaction, "Might as well fit the entire stereotype. What about you? What do you teach?"

"Potions."

"You must be good, to be teaching the only school of magic in Great Britain at your age."

Severus found himself preening. "Now where did you learn that?"

"McGonagall mentioned it yesterday," Watson said absently. Then he suddenly grinned. "Harry! You look like a real wizard!"

Severus looked up and found Potter fully outfitted in school robes and pointed hat. He was smiling broadly. Watson pulled out a black rectangular Muggle device roughly the size of a child's palm and gestured Potter to pose. Severus noticed the screen on the device replicated whatever that was directly in front of it, though it struggled to keep up whenever Watson moved too quickly.

"Smile!" said Watson.

The device made a clicking noise reminiscent of a camera taking a picture. The screen momentarily held the frozen image of the grinning Potter before it went back to reflecting whatever that was directly in front of it. Potter hopped off the stool and went to Watson to commiserate over the device. Whatever it was they were doing, it made them giggle.

They left Madam Malkin's shortly after this, and met Hagrid again as they passed by Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. Watson left Potter in the gamekeeper's clutches, but not before taking several photographs (Severus figured out the device really was a camera) of Hagrid and Potter (and old Fortescue for some odd reason).

"Where can we get the textbooks second-hand?" Watson asked as they walked away.

"Why not new?" asked Severus.

"A good second-hand book does the job just fine and they tend to be a cheaper," said Watson matter-of-factly.

They purchased the textbooks from the second-hand bookshop (Watson rejected anything that were too roughly handled). Watson asked if there was anything Severus would recommend for supplemental reading, and what books of literature (children and adult) were considered wizarding classics.

"Why do you want them?"

"Your world is basically a foreign country to us," said Watson. "The best way to learn about a foreign culture is listening to the stories they tell and the songs they sing."

Severus smiled at this bit of wisdom.

They returned to Fortescue's thirty minutes later, after Watson nearly filled the wheeled suitcase with old books. Severus found himself regaling Watson with several childhood tales of James Potter at the latter's prompting. Severus was going over the worse sins of James Potter and Sirius Black, elder Potter's best friend and traitor, when the doctor stopped short. Severus followed his line of sight and saw the large birdcage holding a sleeping snowy owl on Potter's lap.

"What is that?" Watson said, pointing at the bird.

"It's an owl," Potter said, grinning. "Hagrid got it for me as an early birthday present."

"Oh," said Watson. He took in Potter's barely suppressed glee and the proud, beaming face of Hagrid and sighed. "Right. Thanks, Hagrid, you shouldn't have. What a beautiful owl. I'm sure Sherlock would love it. Now we just have to figure out how we're going to bring it home. That's assuming Mrs. Hudson wouldn't mind." Potter looked down guiltily. "I don't think she will, but you never know. Taking a cab is right out. Maybe Lestrade would give us a lift?" He looked at Severus again. "Bookstore, please, for new books."

"What for?"

"For the latest bestselling drivel and teenybopper songs for reasons I mentioned earlier."

Severus actually laughed at that. Hagrid looked at him strangely.

They went to Flourish and Blotts. Hagrid offered to stay out and hold onto Potter's new owl. Watson talked to the manager for the latest bestsellers and longstanding classics, and the manager made several recommendations (the *Tales of Beedle the Bard* among them). After taking two samples of each category, Watson and Potter perused the shelves. Watson was savagely beaten about the head by a volume of *The First Wizard War: the Rise and Fall of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named* after reading too many of its pages without paying. He seemed more amused than upset when the manager pulled the book away and apologized profusely for not warning him about the Thief's Curse.

"Wizards have a wicked sense of humour," Watson observed.

They saved Ollivander's for last. Hagrid and Severus waited outside the wand shop, as it would have been too crowded otherwise. When they came out, a good while later, both Watson and Potter looked thoughtful.

"Just something Mr. Ollivander said," Watson answered when Hagrid asked. He didn't elaborate further.

It was long past lunchtime when they returned to the archway leading back to the Leaky Cauldron. The other children, their respective parents and his fellow teachers were already there.

McGonagall, Flitwick and Sprout blatantly stared when they found Severus and Watson quietly chatting about toxicology (Watson, it turned out, knew a lot about Muggle poisons and how to effectively administer them).

"Can we take a group photo?" Watson asked the crowd, taking out his camera.

"Yours still works?" asked Mr. Granger. "Mine wouldn't even turn on."

"Ours went up in smoke!" said Mrs. Finch-Fletchley, holding up a still smoking silver rectangular object.

"Mine *exploded* !" said the older Mr. Thomas.

Watson frowned at his fellow parents, clearly puzzled. Then he looked at Severus. "Did you do something?"

"No," said Severus.

Watson turned his gaze back to his camera and pondered this. Then he shrugged. "So, pictures?"

They took a lot of pictures. The poses and expressions of the parents and children got progressively sillier as they warmed up to their surroundings. Some of the parents asked the Hogwarts staff if they would like to take pictures with them (Hagrid and Flitwick was their favourite). Watson took a candid shot of Severus when he wasn't looking and grinned cheekily at his outrage. Mr. Granger took the pictures of Watson and Potter together (for people who were unsmiling by default, they seemed quite capable of making fools of themselves). He and his wife were very happy to meet a fellow medical professional, and lost no time making conversation with Watson.

Watson was taking the final jumping shot (capturing the moment when people were airborne was popular with Muggles, apparently) of the children wearing their pointed hats and cloaks when a rather unsavoury individual bumped into him.

"Piss off, you filthy Muggle," came the low growl.

Watson's reaction was instantaneous. Before Flitwick or Severus could draw their wands, Watson had the individual face-first on the ground, foot grinding the spot between the shoulder blades and wand arm twisted behind the back. Then with a hard pinch, Watson wrenched the wand out of the man's hand too.

Then the staff noticed what Watson was doing.

"Dr. Watson!" McGonagall screeched in horror.

"What?" Watson asked as he twisted the arm further back, still holding the wand.

There was a terrified silence. Watson looked uncertainly about. "Um, sorry for causing a fight?" he tried.

Flitwick started waving his hands and bouncing on the balls of his feet in his agitation.

"Wands *explode* when Muggles touch them, Dr. Watson!" he squeaked.

Watson didn't need to be told twice. He quickly tossed the wand away. Then he released the arm, and kicked the unsavory individual as a good measure.

"Piss off," he hissed.

The street cleared within the next heartbeat. Watson stood in the middle of the large berth, loose fists held at each side, breathing evenly and looking equal parts thunderous and expressionless. It was an awe-inspiring sight.

"Your Dad is so cool," young Thomas whispered to Potter fervently.

Then Potter, who so far displayed disconcerting amount of emotional reserve, made an expression of pure outrage.

"That's not my Dad that's my Mum!"

The reaction to this revelation was spectacular to say the least. But the only thing Severus remembered later was Hagrid sitting heavily

on the ground, almost squashing Flitwick. His own mind revolved around: *Bloody hell, no way!* (He remembered someone shouting that out loud; he hoped it wasn't him.)

"Okay, what was it, the name or the lack of these?" Watson asked, annoyed, as he -she!- made cupping motions in front of his -her!- chest.

Severus shook his head without meaning to. It wasn't as if Watson looked like a man because he -no, *she* dammit- really didn't. The face was pretty in a vaguely androgynous way and the hair was cut short in the same way as Hooch's. The curves were there and the hips were there, subtle as they were, and despite the flatness of the chest and the scarring on the neck, neither made Watson look masculine. The voice was a pleasant contralto. The name, of course, was male, but it fit like a glove rather than stick out like a broken nose. So what was it? Why did his mind shy away from assigning a pronoun to Watson until the name 'John' gave him the confidence to settle on 'he'?

Then Severus realized what it was. It was Watson's *presence* . From glace to carriage, Watson seemed to radiate-not *male* per se, but *power* . Watson exuded the same inexplicable sense of power men of confidence displayed in a crowd, wordlessly making known that they were entitled to be there and others ought to walk around them. What was really astonishing, though, was that Watson seemed to be doing it unconsciously, and not at all like how other strong women went about it.

It took a while for the group calm down and for Watson to stop being annoyed. Once calm, the parents exchanged contact information, and discussed the possibility of creating a Muggle-born parent support group ("Splendid idea! Why haven't we thought of this before?" said Flitwick). Watson promised to e-mail out the pictures, then holding Potter by the hand, bade them all farewell.

Severus watched them vanish into the busy Muggle streets. Despite everything that happened earlier and everything he knew about them, they still looked like a perfectly ordinary pair of father-and-son.

Final Notes : What I did to John was done for serious plot reasons. As in, why JKR did what she did to Sirius Black kind of plot reasons. Just so you know.

The Curious Magic in 221B

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Four: The Curious Magic in 221B

Harry crossed off another day on the calendar. As he did so, he felt the familiar mixture of dread and excitement pool in his stomach.

Even now, the idea of going to Hogwarts felt unreal. Though he had an idea that magic existed months before he got his Hogwarts letter, it hadn't occurred to him that there might be others-so many others that there was a school for people like him. But it did exist, as Professor Dumbledore's regular visits to Baker Street to make the flat magically secure constantly reminded him.

To pass the days before school started, Harry stayed in the flat reading the books John bought and keeping his new owl company. By mutual agreement, Harry decided to name her Hedwig, a name he'd got from *A History of Magic* (Sherlock's suggestion, Discord, was soundly rejected). His books were very interesting. Harry would read them late into the night, as Hedwig swooped in and out of the open window of his room (Harry wondered what Mycroft made of this). Sometimes Sherlock and John would read with him, and he and John would giggle over Sherlock's acidic commentary.

Speaking of Sherlock, one would think it was Sherlock who was going to Hogwarts, not Harry. Sherlock read all of Harry's schoolbooks and knew the material backwards and forwards. Since

he couldn't do any magic, Sherlock made Harry practice all the spells and potions he wanted to try (Sherlock tried to brew potions on his own at first, but had to give up because they didn't work unless Harry brewed it for him). It was a good thing John bought all those study aids, especially the enchanted mirror once owned by a witch that shouted at him if he did something wrong, because things could've gone very badly. As for the experiments, though it was fun to magically pick locks and turn pipettes to pins and test tubes to tapeworms, it did get wearying eventually. Sherlock complained Harry wasn't as excited as he should be and wondered if he was already turning cynical.

But Harry *was* excited, despite the tiring and frankly bizarre experiments Sherlock engaged him in. However, he couldn't help but feel a bit wary. For one thing, he was going to enter Hogwarts as *Harry Potter* and Harry wasn't keen about that. Besides the whole The-Boy-Who-Lived business, Harry had got used to being Harry Watson, and sharing John's last name always made his new life feel more permanent (he called John 'Mum' in his head; he rarely said so out loud because calling John 'Mum' made him feel obligated to call Sherlock 'Dad', and that just didn't feel right). He would also be away from London until Christmas break, and that sounded like a terribly long time. What if he got homesick?

So Harry had spent the entire month of August torn between anticipation and worry. Then before he knew it, it was the last day of August. Professor Dumbledore was going to pay his final visit for the summer, and as usual, Sherlock was downstairs since the early hours of the morning, ready to pounce as soon as the Headmaster arrived.

John glanced at the Sherlock-gargoyle on the couch, the old editions of the *Daily Prophet* strewn over the coffee table and sighed.

"Morning Harry," said John, joining Harry in the kitchen. "Morning Sherlock. Can either of you tell me why the skull is the size of a walnut?"

It was scary how questions like these became normal, Harry thought.

"I made Harry shrink it," said Sherlock. "I'll put it in your pocket for safekeeping until we can grow it back."

"Fine. So when are you getting rid of those newspapers? I don't fancy explaining the animated photos to Lestrade."

"Lestrade won't be coming. He's busy playing nursemaid."

John looked up in the middle of making beans on toast.

"Ellen Lestrade is sick," said John, working through the logic, "very sick, obviously, or else she would've let me know. Her kids are probably down with the same bug. Lestrade doesn't have anyone who can look after them or else he wouldn't be playing nursemaid for so long."

"Oh good you're improving."

" *That ' s not the point*," John said between gritted teeth. "When someone is in trouble like that, you offer help."

"He won't accept."

"He doesn't *have* to accept, offering him help is my choice," John started heating up the instant porridge. "I'm calling him later. Coffee's on the drip, by the way, if you want some. Sugar's in its usual spot."

Right at that moment, the fireplace suddenly came alive with green flames and a tall, thin old man with a long silvery beard and equally long hair wearing long, flowing robes stepped out from the hearth.

"Good morning everyone," said Dumbledore cheerfully. "Yes, Sherlock, what would you like to ask today?"

Sherlock brandished an old copy of the *Daily Prophet*, which they started getting since the end of July.

"There is no mention of Harry's disappearance for the entirety of last year. Not in the *Daily Prophet*, not in the *Wizarding World Today*, not even in the *Quibbler* . Why?"

"The Minister of Magic didn't want to cause panic, so he kept the information from the public," said Dumbledore calmly. "I only knew because the person who kept on eye on Harry tipped me off."

Sherlock sneered at that. "Obviously."

Apparently that was all he wanted to know, because Sherlock dramatically swept into the kitchen without another word. John offered Dumbledore tea, which he accepted (after finding the collection of fingernails in the margarine tub, the headmaster stopped eating in 221B altogether). Harry dug into his porridge.

"Maybe we should get a bigger table," John said as Dumbledore took the seat next to Harry.

"I read about extension charms in the grade five Spell book," Sherlock said from the kitchen.

"That wouldn't be quite the right spell," Dumbledore said, winking at Harry. "I see you've mastered the shrinking charm, Harry. Have you tried the engorgement charm?"

"The pseudo-Latin of these spells is a *disgrace*," Sherlock grumbled as he slunk back into the sitting room, coffee in hand. "One would think if wizards insist on using Latin, they'd use it properly."

"Ah, but it's not the correctness of Latin or Latin itself that makes the spell," Dumbledore said as Harry eyed the shrunken skull. "It's the *intent* behind the words, you see. Words crystallize thought and crystallized thought gives magic its form. We use Latin because it's very convenient for spell work."

Harry chewed on this. "So I could use regular English if I wanted to?"

"Theoretically, yes," Dumbledore confirmed. "Many witches and wizards have tried, but success was limited. I believe the hindering factor was the lack of division between conversational English and incantation English. Practitioners would often find themselves flung across the room or bursting into flames after saying perfectly normal things like 'I must go to the kitchen.' or 'I'd rather set myself on fire.'

whilst holding their wands."

"Doesn't sound very practical," John said.

"Heavens, no," Dumbledore beamed as Harry pointed his wand at the skull and whispered ' *Engorgio* '. "Good job, Harry. This flat just isn't the same without a full-sized skull."

Harry thought the skull was a tad smaller than it was previously, but he supposed it was better than walnut-size.

"Now," said Dumbledore, sounding very business-like. "I think I finally found the solution to the security problem. It was, of course, the first option I considered, but quickly rejected because I thought it wouldn't work. Which goes to show one's first instinct is often the most accurate. But I digress. May I have your help, John?"

John smiled. "What do I need to do?"

"As far as direct actions goes: nothing. I just need to examine some of your possessions and ask you several seemingly unrelated questions."

"That doesn't sound too bad."

"Indeed. Now please partake your breakfast. I do not think my questions are for those who have empty stomachs."

After they finished eating, Dumbledore asked John a lot of questions. Some of them were scary, like the one about Afghanistan wizards ("Don't think I met any. But then, I might not remember it even if did."). Others were interesting, but didn't sound very helpful ("The first time I met a witch or a wizard? You know, Mr. Lee might have been one. He and my Dad used to play rugby together. I saw him jump twelve feet in the air when he thought no one was looking."). The rest were just odd ("Was I a healthy baby? No. No, I wasn't, but then I got better."). Sherlock asked if Dumbledore was trying to establish if John was an undiscovered witch. Dumbledore said John was most assuredly a Muggle. Harry was very disappointed.

"How *do* you find Muggle-borns, anyway?" asked Sherlock.

"We have our means," said Dumbledore. "I'm afraid that is all I can tell you."

After all those questions, Dumbledore asked if John had any childhood items. John confessed to regularly throwing away or donating all but the latest bare essentials since joining the army. In fact, they could probably fit all of John's worldly possessions in three medium sized suitcases.

Dumbledore looked very thoughtful. "Do you have items you've kept for over a decade?"

"Nope, sorry."

"Five years?"

"I might have a four-year-old sock."

"No, that won't do," Dumbledore said in tone full of amused exasperation. "Just out of curiosity, John, how in the world did you end up without even a five year old sock?"

John shrugged. "I got really skinny after Afghanistan. So I threw away all my old clothes and got a new wardrobe."

Then suddenly John went still.

"Hang on, I might have something."

John plunged a hand into Sherlock's shirt and pulled out the dog tags he was wearing.

"I had these since I was eighteen," said John. "I gave it to Sherlock as a wedding present. Sorry, I forgot."

Dumbledore looked triumphant. "Oh, that's *perfect* ."

Sherlock removed the ball chain from his neck and handed it over to Dumbledore. Dumbledore carefully examined the tags. It was a standard issue British military ID, one disk on a long ball chain and

the other disk on a shorter ball chain attached to the longer one. Each tag had John's old service number and the words O POS, WATSON, JH, CE and ARMY engraved on it. Dumbledore tapped both disks with the tip of his wand. Then he held up the disk hanging on the shorter chain.

"Would you terribly mind if I gave this one to Harry?"

Sherlock stared unblinkingly. "No."

"Excellent," Dumbledore removed the short ball chain from the main chain, lengthen it with a wordless spell and handed it over to Harry. "Make sure you always wear this."

"Is that it?" John asked as Harry put on the chain around his neck.

"That is all," said Dumbledore. "The curious thing about this solution is that there is nothing at all to do because everything has already been done."

John frowned at this. "How can this be?"

"There is far more to magic than spells and enchantments, John. Perhaps one day I will be allowed to tell you."

"The statute of secrecy?" said Sherlock in disgust.

"Yes," said Dumbledore. Then briefly, he stared at the ceiling.

"I'm starting to think the wizarding world has impoverished itself when it separated from the Muggle world. The magic I've witnessed in this flat alone is very curious indeed."

"But John and I are *Muggles*," Sherlock snapped. "Non-magical. *Completely lacking in magic* . Then how-"

"Then how can there be any magic here beyond the obvious?" Dumbledore asked in Sherlock's place, as he peered over his half-moon glasses. "That, my dear Sherlock, is what makes the magic here so very curious."

"You got to admit, Harry, Dumbledore has *style* ."

Harry nodded fervently. Dumbledore left 221B shortly after his parting words to Sherlock and thanking John for the tea. Sherlock was absolutely furious, and descended into a tirade of the likes Harry had only heard when Mycroft or Mr. Anderson was around. Then he flung himself to the couch and sulked. Since both John and Harry liked idea of sharing space with a sulking Sherlock as much as the next Scotland Yard detective, they beat a hasty retreat from Baker Street after grabbing anything that might cause too much damage (Harry's wand and John's weapon).

Once outside, John called DI Lestrade to see if he still needed someone to relieve him of his bedside duties, only to learn they were slightly late. Mr. Lestrade's children made full recovery two days ago and Mrs. Lestrade was on the mend. He thanked them anyway. Thus left on loose ends, they decided to take a stroll around Regent's Park.

"You're not allowed to repeat anything he said by the way," John said. "Delete it if you can."

"Okay," said Harry. He didn't understand half of the words Sherlock said anyway.

"Right." John's fingers started twitching, like they always did when war-related memories surfaced. "Harry, do you mind if I got you another tag? I know those things can be a bother, but… well. Only *dead* servicemen wear one tag on the field."

Harry didn't know that. "No, I don't mind."

John gave him a wane smile. "Good."

They wandered around for many hours. They fed the Herons at the lake, and ate ice-lollies under a shady tree. Harry fell asleep to the sound of John reading *The Lord of the Rings* . After the nap and eating a couple of sandwiches for lunch, they took a stroll down Regent's canal. There they had a short bout of excitement when they saved a little girl who fell in. Harry successfully used a ' *Wingardium Leviosa* ' to draw the girl out of water, and John quickly

got hold of her before anyone noticed she was floating in thin air. Harry hoped the little girl's venerable looking Eurasian grandmother didn't pay too much attention to their suspiciously dry clothes.

It was late afternoon when Sherlock texted John. He didn't apologize, of course, but instead told them to meet him at Angelo's.

"He's feeling better then," said John lightly. "Let's go pick up the tags."

They went to the accessories shop John had got the original dog tags. There was already a tag that had the name HARRY printed on it, so they got that. Then, after a moments hesitation, John asked for the name SHERLOCK be engraved on a blank tag.

It was well after six when they made it to Northumberland Street. Sherlock was already sitting at the usual table. He surprised them all by ordering food and actually eating it. Harry couldn't tell if Sherlock was up to something or just being strange, because there was no discernible difference between the two states and Sherlock's usual weirdness. Mr. Angelo shattered a wineglass when Sherlock later ordered desert and-wonder of wonders-ate it too.

It was when there was only coffee/hot chocolate to mull over did Sherlock showed them what he was up to.

"Here," he said, pulling out a new phone.

"For Harry?" John asked.

"No, this one's for you," said Sherlock. "I transferred your number over when I activated it. Your old phone now has Harry's new number."

This sort of thing happened all the time, so Harry took it to stride. He supposed he was better off having John's old phone than a new one. For one thing, John's phone had all kinds of special features and Mycroft's number was in the contact list. Harry couldn't think of a situation where he would need either, but then again, one never knew.

"Text me when you get on the train," Sherlock went on. "Then text

me again when you're at school. Take pictures, videos, audio recordings-anything interesting. Then send them."

"You're not going to King's Cross tomorrow?" Harry asked in surprise and-a bit of hurt.

"Mycroft will likely try to interfere," said Sherlock.

Harry supposed that was reason enough. Mycroft was always polite to him, but it was a cold kind of polite, and his strong interest in Harry's magic always made him feel uneasy. Still, he rather hoped Sherlock would be able to go.

"Want me to rough him up for you?" John asked.

Sherlock smirked, all crooked angles and teeth. "Tempting, but I promised Mummy I wouldn't let him get hurt."

"I'll just egg the CCTV cameras, then."

They shared a laugh over that. The rest of the evening was light, happy and… *normal* . Sherlock didn't mention a single private detail he deduced from their fellow diners or complain about the latest stupidity of the MET. Instead he told them all manner of funny stories and John laughed non-stop. Between the bouts of laughter, John gave Sherlock his new secondary tag. Sherlock put it on his ball chain immediately and made Harry do the same. As for Harry, he savored the moment. After all, it wasn't everyday they acted like a normal family.

On September the first, Harry woke up a bit late, having stayed up until three in the morning packing and repacking his trunk then lying in his bed imagining the train ride and his first day at Hogwarts. He prayed that there wouldn't be a repeat of his second trip to Diagon Alley; the moment they realized he was Harry Potter, everyone in the Leaky Cauldron wanted to shake his hand, like he was some kind of venerated saint. It was a pity he couldn't wear contacts for long periods of time or cover his scar with plaster for an entire year without drawing attention, because he would have seriously done it.

Harry dashed down the stairs, noting absently that his hair seemed longer than he remembered it being last night. At the kitchen he stopped, shut his eyes hard and opened them again to make sure he wasn't in a middle of a nightmare.

It was definitely John and Sherlock sitting at the kitchen table, but there was something terribly wrong about the way they looked. Sherlock styled his hair differently, so it no longer looked like a curly black dandelion puff as it usually did. He was also wearing a pair of wire-frame glasses, a pin-strip beige shirt under a taupe jumper and khaki trousers. John was wearing the usual jeans and long-sleeve knitwear combo, except the top was a white turtleneck and the trousers were skinny jeans. But that wasn't the problem. The problem was John's hair. It was long. *Past the shoulder- blades* long. Harry just couldn't accept it.

"Excellent, he's awake and the disguise is perfect," said Sherlock in evident satisfaction.

"You think?" said John. "That was a look of horror, not admiration."

Sherlock ignored that. "We'll flag a cab in thirty minutes. That should be enough time for you to get ready. Then we can the give wizards the slip."

Harry couldn't follow. "Huh?"

"We're giving the wizards the slip," said John. "Since they remember me as guy and pixie cut and Sherlock as posh and public school…"

" *John*…"

"… We're going as our opposite," John finished.

Harry didn't even know where to start or if there was anything to start to begin with. So he focused on the fact he was running late, and dashed back upstairs to change.

The cab ride to King's Cross Station went smoothly. Hedwig looked at him reproachfully as he hid her cage under a cover that was essentially a glorified cardboard box. Since there was little chance to flag a cab holding an exotic pet, there was nothing for it. In the cab,

Sherlock gleefully told Harry that John and Mycroft had a serious conversation over the phone last night. Sherlock didn't elaborate as to *what* they said, but he did mention John's adjectives had been extremely vigorous.

They made it to King's Cross ten minutes to eleven. They quickly headed over to the barrier between platforms nine and ten, which, they were told by Professor McGonagall, had the hidden entrance to platform 9 and ¾. There they bumped into a family of four boys, two of them twins, a plump woman and little girl, all with flaming red hair.

"Excuse us," said John.

"Oh hello," said the plump woman. "Sending your son off to Hogwarts? My lot's going too."

"Yes," said John. "First time ever, and we learned about Hogwarts only a month ago."

"Goodness you must be so nervous! Do you need help getting into the platform?" the woman asked kindly.

"I was told we just need to walk pass this barrier," said John, pointing at it. "Only-well, we're not magical, so I was wondering if only our son would be able to pass through. I don't want him to board the train by himself."

"Not to worry," said the woman. "Just keep close to your son and walk straight ahead. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash, that's very important. Now go ahead. Do a bit of running if you're nervous."

John thanked the plump woman, and nodded to Sherlock. They gathered around Harry, Sherlock to his left and John to his right. All three of them grasped the handles of Harry's wheeled trunk. Then they marched towards the barrier together. One step, two steps… the wall was just two strides away… three steps… Harry closed his eyes…

… And they kept on walking. Harry opened his eyes. Sherlock was staring ahead with the same intensity he reserved for interesting

crime scenes. John already had their designated phone out, taking a picture of the overhead sign that said *Hogwarts Express* . A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform full of people. Behind them, instead of the barrier, was an iron archway that said *platform nine and three quarters* . They made it.

The three of them slowly made their way down the platform. The smoke from the engine drifted overhead the noisy crowd. Cats of all colours and sizes winded between people's legs. Owls of all species hooted inside their cages in a disgruntled sort of way. Students were chatting with their families in and out of the train, some hanging out of the windows to do so.

"You have to love wizard space," Sherlock muttered. "I love the incorrigibility of it."

They found an empty compartment near the end of the train. John and Sherlock heaved the trunk inside as Harry carried Hedwig. Once everything was set in place, they just stopped. Sherlock's eyes darted around, looking at anything but Harry. John was blinking rapidly. Harry stared at his knees. For while they stewed in this awkward silence, no one knowing what to do next.

"… Okay," said John at last. "I don't care if it's the middle of the night, three in the morning, or the broad light of day. Tell us every stupid cool thing you want to talk about. Complain. Shout. Whatever it is, don't hesitate to call."

Harry nodded. The corners of his eyes prickled. He savagely bit back a sob.

"Now my final word of advice," said John. "This… you're going to a completely different world. You're going to offend people. And they're going to offend you. So be ready to apologise a lot. And don't be unkind. Never, ever be unkind."

Then John crushed him in a hug. Harry clutched at the woolly shirt and buried his face in the crook between the neck and shoulder, breathing in the scent that was uniquely John: tea, old books, wool and gunpowder. A long-fingered hand gripped his shoulder and stayed there. It almost undid Harry.

A whistle sounded. John clutched Harry tighter for a beat. Then slowly and silently, both the hand on his shoulder and the arms around him drew away. Harry stared out the window. In time, Sherlock and John came into view.

The train started to move. In the corner of his eye, he saw the plump woman from earlier waving and her daughter, half-laughing and half-crying, trying to keep up with the moving train. He saw John take a few steps forward, a hand raised to wave or reach out. Sherlock kept his place, but then he slowly raised a hand…

… And Harry watched them all disappear, as the train rounded the corner.

Final Notes : Harry finally rides Hogwarts Express. Writing the King's Cross scene was very difficult; I couldn't avoid lifting directly from the corresponding chapter. I'm rather proud of the first part, though. As always, thank you for your kind reviews. I knew the last chapter could turn off people, and there certainly readers who were, but all of you have been quite kind. Thank you.

Ron and the Philosopher's Stone

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Five: Ron and the Philosopher's Stone

To be honest, Ron didn't think his first year at Hogwarts would be all that cool. Because nothing cool ever happened to him.

He knew in the back of his head that Harry Potter was starting Hogwarts the same year as him, but that was about as relevant to Ron as the next Quidditch World Cup- something really cool, but at most he'd be a spectator and never a player. Sure, he'd probably see him in classes, but it wasn't like Harry Potter would want to *talk* to Ron.

Therefore he was shocked when he learned the pretty Muggle woman who talked to his Mum at the station was Harry Potter's adoptive mother and the black-haired boy standing quietly behind her was Harry Potter himself.

"Are you sure, Fred? How did you know?" his Mum asked.

"Saw his scar. It definitely looked like lightening," said Fred.

"The poor *dear* -no wonder the Muggles didn't look like him, I wondered. At least he was taken in by nice people."

"Never mind that, do you think he remembers how You-Know-Who

looks like?"

Predictably, his Mum got stern at Fred.

"No, don't you dare. He doesn't need that kind of reminder on his first day of school."

"Fine, keep your hair on."

Once inside the train, Ron found himself in a fix. All the compartments seemed to be full, and he didn't fancy sitting next to the twins (they said their friend Lee had a tarantula, and no doubt they'd make him look-augh!). So he kept going down the train until he found a compartment occupied by only one person.

Ron couldn't decide if he was lucky or not when he realized the person was the black-haired boy from earlier.

"Anyone sitting there?" Ron asked a bit nervously, pointing at the empty seat. "Everywhere else is full."

The boy shook his head. "No, I don't mind."

Ron took the seat, and stole a look at his new compartment fellow. He could see the beginnings of a thin scar on the other boy's forehead, half-hidden under the fringe. Then he found himself being looked *back*, so he quickly turned his gaze to the window. After a brief moment of silence, Ron heard the boy shift forward.

"Hi, I'm Harry."

Ron quickly turned. "I'm Ron Weasley." Then unable to help himself he blurted out, "Are you Harry Potter?"

The boy nodded.

"Oh-well, my brother Fred said that you were, and I thought it might be one of his jokes," Ron babbled. "And have you really got… you know…"

Harry pulled back his fringe and Ron saw the famous scar in full detail. It really did look lightning, but unlike what he had imagined, it

was slightly off-centre.

"So that's where You-Know-Who-" Ron asked.

"Yeah, but I don't remember much," said Harry.

"Nothing?" asked Ron eagerly.

"Just a lot of green light and… someone laughing I think."

Ron shivered. " *Wow* ."

Ron found himself staring again, but instead of getting offended, Harry gave him a wry little smile.

"So are all your family wizards?" Harry asked.

"Er, I think so," said Ron.

He rambled about his Mum's second cousin who was a Muggle accountant. Then he found himself rambling again after Harry said that he wished he had wizard brothers and sisters - how having so many older brothers to live up to made it difficult for him to do *anything* cool, and he had pretty cool people for brothers: Bill had been head boy, Charlie was Quidditch house team Captain, Percy was now a prefect, and while Fred and George messed around a lot, they were very smart and very popular. He then complained about never getting anything new because he had five brothers - he got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand, and Percy's old rat Scabbers, who might have died and no one would tell the difference, he was always asleep. Percy got Hermes for being made a prefect, but his parents couldn't afford… Then he realised just how much he'd been talking, and felt his ears burn. He hadn't meant to let out how these things were bothering him, least of all to *Harry Potter*, but it felt *nice* to complain about these things, and Harry didn't seem to mind.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with getting hand-me-downs," said Harry, much to Ron's relief. "I mean, before John and Sherlock took me in, my Muggle relatives made me wear my cousin's old things, and they never gave me real birthday presents. My old Mum and Dad left me a bit of money, but I didn't know that until about a month ago. I'm glad they did, though, because I know John's been

worrying about how to pay for my things. John's not allowed to work, you see, and Sherlock works freelance, so his income's irregular, and these last two years he couldn't take a lot of paying jobs because he was busy fighting the Muggle world's Voldemort-"

Ron gasped.

"What?" Harry asked, looking befuddled.

" *You said You-Know-Who ' s name!* " Ron said, completely shocked. "I thought you of all people-"

"I'm not trying to be brave or anything, saying the name," said Harry, looking abashed. "I just didn't know you're not supposed to. See what I mean? I don't know how to think like a wizard and I don't know enough to even ask the right questions. I bet…" His shoulders sagged. "… I bet I'll be the worst in class."

Ron couldn't imagine this being the case. At any rate, he could totally sympathize about not feeling brilliant.

"You won't be," Ron assured him. "Loads of people come from Muggle families and they learn quickly enough."

Harry asked about Ron's older brothers Charlie and Bill and what they're doing now that they were out of school. Ron told him Charlie was in Romania studying Dragons and Bill was in Africa doing something for Gringotts.

"Did you hear about Gringotts?" Ron asked. "It's been all over the *Daily Prophet*, but I don't suppose you get that with the Muggles- someone tried to rob a high security vault."

"I know, we've been getting the *Daily Prophet* since August," Harry said eagerly. "Do you remember the part that said the vault was emptied three days before the break in? Well, I went to Diagon Alley for my school things three days before the break in, and the Hogwarts person who came to help me emptied vault seven hundred and thirteen on the same day. Sherlock reckons the emptying and the break in are related since the dates match up and people would trust Dumbledore to hide things for them if it was

important."

Ron's jaw dropped.

"My Dad said the break-in must have been done by a powerful Dark wizard," he said in a hushed whisper. "And they'd have to be, to get around Gringotts. I guess it makes sense Dumbledore would know about it and take care of it. I mean, he's supposed to be the greatest wizard alive and Hogwarts is probably even safer than Gringotts."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. Then suddenly he winced. "Sorry, John told me not to talk about this. You could get killed if bad people think you know something they don't want you know."

Ron shuddered. "Let's keep it a secret then."

They talked a bit more. Ron asked Harry about Sherlock and the Muggle world's You-Know-Who. Harry told him Sherlock was a Consulting Detective, which Ron had no clue about, and that he could tell a person's life story just by looking at them.

"Without any magic?" Ron asked incredulously.

"Yeah," said Harry. "I've seen him do it. It's really cool."

Ron goggled. He thought Muggles were *interesting*, sure, but he didn't think they could actually be *cool* . So distracted was he at the idea of Sherlock, he completely forgot about the question that popped in his mind immediately after Harry started talking about his Muggle family.

Around twelve o clock, Harry asked Ron if he wanted to eat lunch. Ron was certainly hungry and he said so, but he shuddered at the thought of showing Harry the sandwiches his Mum packed for him. But then he saw Harry pull out a brown paper bag also filled with lumpy sandwiches, so he relaxed. He pulled a face when he discovered what kind of sandwiches he's Mum made.

"She always forgets I don't like corned beef," he muttered.

"You too?" Harry said sympathetically. "Mrs. Hudson always forgets I don't like bacon. Want to swap?"

Ron was very tempted. "You don't want these, they're all dry." Then he stopped. "You don't like *bacon* ?" He never heard of such a thing.

"I don't like pork in general," Harry said. "But I don't mind beef. Go on, take it."

They swapped. Ron took a bite of Harry's bacon sandwich and savored the taste. It wasn't bad at all. Then he looked at Harry. He seemed to be enjoying the corned beef sandwiches well enough. So Ron devoured the rest of the bacon sandwiches in peace. Harry let him try some of the Muggle fizzy drink he had, and Ron found it wonderfully sweet. When the lunch cart lady came around, Harry said he had some money for treats and asked Ron to help him pick the good stuff. Ten enjoyable minutes later, they came back laden with Chocolate Frogs, Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans, Cauldron Cakes and Pumpkin Pasties.

"I didn't see these in Diagon Alley," Harry said as he opened a packet of Chocolate Frogs. "But then I wasn't really looking-hey, Dumbledore has a card, too!"

"Of course Dumbledore has a card, he's *Dumbledore*," said Ron. "Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa."

"Help yourself." Then to himself Harry muttered: "So Dumbledore's famous for defeating dark wizard Grindelwald and researching Alchemy with Nicolas Flamel…"

They ate their way through the cakes, sweets and pasties. It was nice feeling, sitting there chatting with Harry, who treated Ron like an expert of the wizarding world. Ron briefly wondered if this was what it was like to be cool-you just going about doing business as usual, and bam, people appreciate you for being you. It certainly felt that way. In the meantime, the scenery outside the window turned from fields and cow pastures to forests, rivers and dark green hills. The sunlight got weaker too, and the compartment's indoor lamps started to turn up.

"I can never get enough of wizard photos," said Harry, as he admired his growing pile of Chocolate Frog cards and doing something with his mobile felly-tone (Ron's Dad had got a few

recently, so he knew what they looked like). "Did you know in Muggle photos people just stay put?"

"What, they don't move at all?" Ron said, amazed. " *Weird!* "

Harry grinned. "Once the pictures start moving, it's not a photo anymore, it's a video. I have a few on my phone. Here, look-"

Ron eagerly looked at the mobile felly-tone's screen. The pictures were indeed moving, and it had *sound* too. Then he realised the video was a record of the time they spent at the lunch cart, deliberating over the sweets. It was very odd indeed to see and hear his own self talk about Chocolate Frog cards of famous witches and wizards and that when Bertie Bott's say every flavor they *mean* every flavor.

"This is *amazing*," said Ron.

Harry grinned again. "I'm planning on taking a lot of photos. I'm not sure if I'll have enough *space* ." He studied Ron for a moment. "Hey, want to take a Muggle photo?"

Ron beamed as Harry took several pictures of him and Scabbers. Then they tried to take photos of the two of them together, and laughed at the badly taken photos that cut them off from top, left, right and center. He felt his ears burn again when Harry told him he was going to send the photos and videos to his Muggle parents right away. In the brief message, Harry had typed:

My friend Ron!

"Muggles are really fast about their mail, aren't they?" Ron said as he stared, mesmerized, at the new 'text' (as Harry called it) that came minutes after Harry sent his. It said: *Hi Ron! SH&JW*

"We still have paper mail, but for short quick messages, a lot of Muggles prefer text messages," Harry said.

"Can all mobile felly-tones do this?" Ron asked.

"Most of them can, but only in service areas," said Harry. "Mine's kind of special: I can call and send texts as long as I'm on planet

earth, not stuck in a lead box and the batteries are still running." He paused. "Does Hogwarts have electricity?"

Ron shook his head. "I don't think so."

Harry was really distraught at the news. He sent a quick text that said:

Hogwarts has no electricity :(

The first reply said: *Welcome to world of magic. Send owl for charger. SH.*

The second reply said: *Tell bird if item gets lost or damaged, she shall be eaten. SH.*

The reply after that said: *Don ' t listen to him we ' re not eating owls.*

"Your Muggle parents are funny," Ron sniggered. Harry grinned.

The compartment door slid open. A round-faced boy and a girl with lots of curly brown hair and rather large front teeth stepped in.

"Has anyone seen a toad? Neville's lost one," the girl said in a bossy tone.

"Nope, sorry," said Harry.

The girl did a double take.

"Oh, it's you! I thought I recognised you from somewhere. Harry Watson, right?"

Harry Watson? Ron thought as Harry nodded.

"It's really nice to have another person who's Muggle-born," said the girl. "It seems like there's only four of us this year. Were you surprised when you got your letter? I was, but I was so very pleased-I mean, Hogwarts is the very best school of witchcraft there is, I heard. I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?"

She looked at Ron, who couldn't say anything for a beat because he

was felt winded at the speed of her talking. At length he muttered: "I'm Ron Weasley."

"So what have you been doing to prepare for Hogwarts?" Hermione asked, switching her attention back to Harry. "I've learned all the course books by heart, of course, and got a few extra books for background reading. I read *Modern Magical History* and *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts* and *Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century* and of course *Hogwarts, a History.* I hope it will be enough. I've tried a few simple spells too, just for practice, and they all worked for me. What about you?"

Harry looked as stunned as Ron felt, which assured Ron a great deal.

"… My family started reading wizard newspapers," Harry answered at length.

"That's good. What about spells? Have you tried any?"

"Maybe the shrinking charm."

"So you *have* been trying magic. Let's see it then."

She sat down. Harry looked taken aback. For several seconds he just sat there, incredulous at the turn of events, but in the end he relented. Harry took out his wand from his inner jacket pocket, then, after some consideration, set aside a cauldron cake and pointed his wand at it.

" *Reducio* ."

The cauldron cake shrunk to size of a pea. Hermione looked both impressed and satisfied.

"You've really been practicing, haven't you? I tried the charm myself, of course, and it worked fine too. Do either of you know what house you'll be in? I've been asking around, and I hope I'm in Gryffindor, it sounds by far the best; I hear Dumbledore himself was in it, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad… anyway, we'd better go and look for Neville's toad. You two had better change, you know, I expect we'll be there soon."

Then she left, taking the toadless boy with her.

"Whatever house I'm in, I hope she's not in it." Then Ron rounded on Harry. "You! You can do a spell like that and you're worrying about being last in class? How do you know that girl? And what's up with Harry *Watson* ?"

Harry started rubbing the spot above his right eyebrow.

"Harry Watson is my name in the Muggle world-I changed it when John and Sherlock adopted me. I met Hermione in Diagon Alley and I was introduced as Harry Watson then. And I only know how to do that spell because Sherlock made me try it about fifty times until I got it right."

Ron chewed through that. "So you're Harry Watson now?"

"… No," said Harry. He seemed to be descending into gloom. "I'm still Harry Potter in the wizarding world."

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

Harry gave Ron an odd look-like he wanted to let something out, but after considering the climate outside, decided boarding the windows would be a wiser course of action.

"Nothing, I guess. I just have to get used to the name again," said Harry. Then more to himself he muttered. "And just after I finally got new parents, too…"

Ron felt awkward after hearing the last words. He suddenly remembered the way Harry introduced himself earlier in the train. He didn't wonder about it then, when Harry didn't say his last name as he said hi. Now he had to wonder if Harry did it deliberately: not wanting to say Harry Potter, but not allowing himself to say Harry Watson.

Suddenly Harry slapped his cheeks.

"Okay, enough of this," he said. "What houses are your brothers in?"

Ron was only happy to change the subject. "Gryffindor. Mum and

Dad were in it too. I don't know what they'll say if I'm not. I don't suppose Ravenclaw *would* be too bad, but imagine if they put me in Slytherin."

"What's wrong with Slytherin?"

"What's wrong with Slytherin? Dark wizards come from Slytherin! You-Know-Who was in there too!"

Harry blinked. "Huh, I didn't know that." He scratched his head. "At least I know which House I don't want to end up in. Do you know how they sort us into Houses?"

"Some sort of test, I think. Fred said it hurts a lot, but I think he was joking."

A voice echoed through the train as Harry started to panic:

" *We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes ' time. Please leave your luggage on the train. It will be taken to the school separately* ."

"… We better get into our robes," Harry muttered, looking a bit white around the lips.

Ron felt just pale and nervy. "Yeah."

They crammed all the remaining sweets into Harry's trunk. Then they pulled on their robes and joined the teeming throng out in the corridor.

Within two weeks, Ron found himself repeatedly thanking his lucky stars for getting Harry as a friend. Not only was he fun to be around, he stopped Ron from doing some spectacularly stupid things.

Sorting had gone well. All they had to do was wear the old Sorting Hat and it decided which house you belonged to. Both Harry and Ron got sorted in Gryffindor. Harry had to deal with the inevitable hubbub from the student body once they realized he was Harry Potter. Dean Thomas, the other Muggle-born boy who got sorted into Gryffindor, wanted to know how come Professor McGonagall

called him 'Potter, Harry' instead of 'Watson, Harry' ("I changed my name when I got adopted in the Muggle world, but in the Wizarding world I'm still Harry Potter. My old Mum and Dad were a witch and a wizard, you see."). Hermione Granger was upset Harry didn't tell her who he really was at the train ("I read all about you in those books you know!").

The welcoming feast after the Sorting Ceremony was *excellent* . Everyone enjoyed it, though Ron did notice Harry avoided the pork chops, bacon and sausages. The older Muggle-born students were surprised when they found out Harry's phone still worked in Hogwarts, and asked if they could borrow it here and now and then ("Dunno know if I can. John said this thing probably has fingerprint/ voice verification." "Bloody hell, what does your parents do?"). Harry took many pictures of the Great Hall, the ceiling enchanted to look like the sky, the food and the ghosts. Harry was particularly fascinated by the ghosts, and kept asking Nearly Headless Nick, the resident ghost of the Gryffindor Tower, all sort of questions:

"How did you end up a ghost, Nick? Why do some people become ghosts and some don't? Do only wizards and witches turn into ghosts?"

"I really do *prefer* you called me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington," Nearly Headless Nick said, sounding very stiff and very uncomfortable. "And I do not think this is the right time or place to discuss such things."

Harry looked very putout at that, but he didn't press the issue.

After the feast, Dumbledore gave them a few warnings and announcements-no going to the Forbidden Forest, no magic in the corridors, and Quidditch trials on the second week of the term. His last warning, however, was rather curious:

"Finally I must tell you that this year the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

Ron didn't think Dumbledore was being serious until the third morning of the term. As he and Harry tried to find their way to the

Charms classroom, they got lost and ended up at the entrance of the forbidden third floor corridor.

"It won't open," Ron had said, pushing at the door.

"Maybe you're supposed to magically unlock it?" Harry wondered. He pulled out his wand and tapped the lock, saying: " *Alohomora.* "

The lock clicked and the door swung open-and they saw, quite clearly, what would cause the 'very painful death' Dumbledore warned them about.

The door wasn't hiding a classroom. It hid a corridor, and ten feet in there was a monstrous dog, a dog so large that it filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. As if that wasn't enough, the dog had three heads. Three pairs of mad rolling eyes stared at them, three noses twitched and quivered as it sniffed, and three drooling mouths bared six rows of sharp yellow teeth.

Harry slammed the door shut as the dog started growling like rumbling thunder. Then they turned and ran to the other direction as fast as their legs could carry them. They toppled a couple of suits of armour and left Professor Quirrell, the Defence against the Dark Arts teacher, sprawling on the ground in their rush to put as much distance between them and the nightmare dog as possible. They didn't stop running until they reached the entrance hall, where they collapsed into a sit at the stairway.

"What do you think they're doing, keeping a dog like that locked up in a school?" Ron asked shakily as he took deep recovering breaths. "And how did you know that spell? You said you only tried the shrinking charm!"

Harry looked mentally weary as well as physically winded. "You'd know that charm too if Sherlock made you try it on a hundred sixty-three different Muggle locks." At Ron's look of disbelief, Harry said. "I *counted* ."

They avoided the out-of-bounds corridor after that. They did discuss it though, and agreed the dog was probably guarding whatever it is the Hogwarts staff took out from vault seven hundred and thirteen.

With that minor mystery solved, Ron and Harry turned their attention back to their classes.

The classes were an *ordeal*, and that was without even counting the challenge of finding the bloody classrooms. Ron had learned to read and write and do arithmetic from his mother at home, so he'd never *been* in a classroom until he got to Hogwarts. He was warned sitting down, taking notes and listening to what the teacher was nattering about for hours on end was going to be difficult, but no amount of warning could have prepared him for the real thing. Ron thought he doomed until Harry, who went to Muggle primary school and so was used to this sort of thing, let him copy his notes and poked him awake if need be. Each class was different, thus called for different coping mechanisms. Some were as boring as death, like the History of Magic (which was ironic, since Professor Binns, the history of magic teacher, was a ghost). Some *sounded* cool, but turned out to be a joke (Defence against the Dark Arts; Professor Quirrell's constant stutter and trembling didn't make him sound very credible). Some were doable and occasionally interesting (Charms, Herbology and Astronomy). Others promised lots of hard work and never broke them (Transfiguration).

As Ron suspected, Harry turned out to be quite brilliant. Not like Hermione, who loved to show off in class, did all the spells correctly on the first or second try, and frequently wrote double the length required for their homework assignments. Harry never raised his hand in class, but if the teacher asked him, he usually knew the answer. He was very good at spells too, better at Transfigurations than Hermione even, and would usually figure out what he needed to do well before the class was over. He also had an absolutely brilliant reason for never writing more than strictly necessary ("Think about the poor teacher who has to read the same information over and over again."), thus giving Ron an iron-clad excuse to never write a longer than necessary essay. The only class Harry had trouble in was Potions, and it wasn't Harry's fault, but the teacher's.

They had their first double Potions class on Friday. Harry's owl Hedwig delivered the charger Sherlock had promised that morning. It looked like a book without pages- its covers were made of two shiny dark metal panels stuck inside white plastic casings, and a

small blue box with a narrow rectangular opening was attached next to the spine. Harry also got a note from Hagrid, who invited him for tea in the afternoon. It was a good thing they had the charger and tea with Hagrid to look forward to, because Potions had been a disaster.

The potions classes were held in the dungeons. It was creepy place, both colder and darker than the rest of the castle, and covered wall to wall with jars of pickled animals and sinister looking plants. Professor Snape entered soon after Ron and Harry settled at the workstation next to Seamus Finnigan and Neville Longbottom's. Snape started class by taking a roll call. He paused at Harry's name.

"Harry Potter," he said softly. "Our new- *celebrity* ."

A pale blond Slytherin boy and his two troll-like cronies sitting like bookends to his either side sniggered behind their hands. Harry drew his eyebrows together in a small frown and started worrying the inside of his mouth. After Snape finished calling their names, he looked at the class, sweeping his cold black eyes over them.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion making," said Snape. Though he spoke barely above a whisper, his voice carried over without effort. "There will be no foolish wand-waving or silly incantations in the class. As such, I don't expect many of you will understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron and the delicate power of liquids that creep through veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses… I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even put a stopper in death- *if* you are the select few who can handle my instructions and prove not to be the usual dunderheads I have to teach."

Silence followed this little speech. Hermione was on the edge of her seat and looked desperate to prove she wasn't a dunderhead.

"Potter!" Snape barked suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

As usual, Hermione's hand shot up in the air, but Snape ignored her. Harry nibbled on his lower-lip a few seconds before he answered a bit hesitantly: "Draught of Living Death?"

Snape looked displeased that Harry knew the answer.

"Where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar, Potter?" he asked again.

Harry sounded more certain this time: "A goat's stomach."

Snape's lips thinned.

"What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

Harry looked stumped. Ron privately thought it was amazing he lasted this far-he hadn't known the answers to any of Snape's questions. Hermione, in meantime, actually stood up, her hand stretching towards the dungeon ceiling.

"I don't know, sir," said Harry quietly.

Snape's lips curled into a sneer.

"Didn't finish your reading, have you?"

Then suddenly he switched into a forbidding expression.

"Sit down," he snapped at Hermione. "For your information, monkshood and wolfsbane are the same plant, and also go by the name of aconite. Asphodel and wormwood indeed makes a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death. I'm surprised that you actually knew that a bezoar is a stone taken from the stomach of a goat, Potter, but you have failed to mention that it can save you from most poisons. Well? Why aren't you all copying that down?"

This triggered a rush to rummage for quills and parchment. Over the noise, Snape said, "A point from Gryffindor for your incomplete preparation, Potter."

The Potions lesson just went downhill from there. Snape put them in pairs and set them to brew a simple boil-curing potion. He swept around in his long black robes, looming over them like a ominous bird of prey as they prepared the ingredients, criticizing almost

everyone except the blond Slytherin boy who laughed earlier, Draco Malfoy, whom he seemed to like. In the middle of class, Neville somehow melted Seamus's cauldron into a twisted blob, and their potion seeped across the stone floor whilst generating clouds of poisonous green smoke and burned holes in people's shoes. Snape shouted at Neville, calling him an idiot for putting the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire. After ordering Seamus to take the whimpering and boil-covered Neville to the Hospital wing, Snape rounded on Harry.

"You, Potter, why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Did you think it would make you look good if he got it wrong? That's another point from Gryffindor."

It was so outrageous even Harry opened his mouth to argue. Ron had to kick him behind their cauldron to stop him.

"Don't push it," Ron hissed. "I've heard Snape can turn very nasty."

The remaining hour was nothing short of torture. Snape increased his acidic commentary and his unnerving stare, concentrating on Harry in particular. It was miracle they didn't flub the potion like Neville, and Ron felt hugely relieved when they submitted their vial of potion for grading.

"He hates me," Harry said flatly as they climbed the stairs out of the dungeon at the end of class.

"He hates everyone I think," said Ron, trying to cheer him up. "Snape is always taking points off Fred and George."

Harry disagreed. "He hates me *especially* ."

Harry continued to look depressed until they returned to the Gryffindor tower. There, Harry recovered his spirits as they examined the mobile phone charger Sherlock sent that morning. Ron couldn't believe his ears when Harry told him the charger used *sunlight* to generate electricity (how? *how?*). Once Harry figured out how to use it and recharged his phone, he had a short conversation with John.

"Yeah, I just had Potions with Professor Snape," said Harry. "You were right. He sounds exactly like Sherlock when he talks to Mr. Anderson. I never thought I'd be in that position."

Later Harry gave a typical example of Sherlock talking to the mysterious Mr. Anderson. So Snape-like was the 'Anderson, don't talk, you'll lower the IQ of the entire street!' George actually came over and asked them if Snape was harassing a kid named Anderson.

"You know, the more you talk about him, the nastier Sherlock sounds," Ron said as they headed over the Hagrid's.

"He can be," Harry admitted. "But he only comes off that way because he's terrible at being good."

They made it to the small wooden house on the edge of the forbidden forest Hagrid lived in. When Harry knocked, they heard a frantic scrabbling from the inside and several booming barks. The sound reminded Ron and Harry the thee-headed hellhound in the forbidden corridor and they winced.

Hagrid's large, hairy face appeared in the crack as he opened the door. He let them in while struggling to keep hold on the collar of an enormous black boarhound named Fang. There was only one room inside, and Hagrid, who always looked too big to be allowed, seem to fill the entire space. Hams, pheasants and stoats were hanging on the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on an open fire, and in the corner there was a massive bed covered with a patchwork quilt.

"Make yerselves at home," said Hagrid. As soon as he let go of Fang, the dog bounded over to Ron and started licking his ears and slobbering all over his robes.

"This is Ron," Harry told Hagrid, who poured boiling water into a teapot.

"Another Weasley, eh?" said Hagrid, looking at Ron's red hair and freckles through crinkled, beetle-black eyes. "I spend half me life chasin' yer twin brothers away from the forest."

They talked about their first week of classes over tea and rock cakes so hard it almost broke their teeth. Like Ron, Hagrid told Harry to not worry about Snape, as he hardly liked any of the students. They then shared their mutual dislike of Argus Filch, the caretaker. Hagrid called Filch a git and accused the caretaker of ordering his horrible cat Mrs. Norris to follow Hagrid around whenever he entered the castle, much to Ron's delight. The conversation continued to revolve around such fun, harmless things until Harry confessed to accidentally opening the entrance to the forbidden corridor and seeing the three-headed monster dog from hell. Hagrid dropped his teacup in shock.

"You saw Fluffy?"

" *Fluffy* ?"

"Yeah, he's mine- bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year. I lent him to Dumbledore to guard the-"

"Yes?" Harry prompted.

"Now, don't ask me anymore," said Hagrid gruffly. "That's top secret, that is."

"I'm just worried about security," Harry said. "You can open that door with a simple unlocking charm. That doesn't sound very safe to me."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid. "There's more than just a locked door and Fluffy doin' the protectin'."

"But Hagrid, if you can control the dog, it means someone else could possibly control it too!"

"That's ruddy unlikely!" said Hagrid hotly. "Now listen to me, Harry- yer meddlin' in things that don' concern yeh. It's dangerous. You forget that dog, an' you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel-"

"Nicolas Flamel is involved too?" Harry said blankly.

Hagrid looked furious with himself. Harry took pity.

"I'm not interested in meddling," Harry assured Hagrid. "And we're not going to tell this to anyone. People might think we know more than we actually do and that might get us killed. Right, Ron?"

Ron nodded. Hagrid relaxed.

"So how's yer brother Charlie?" Hagrid asked Ron loudly. "I liked him a lot-great with animals."

Ron told Hagrid all about Charlie's work with dragons. In the corner of his eye, Ron saw Harry fiddle around with his phone, which chimed three times. Harry quietly put it away after reading whatever messages he got.

Harry showed Ron what he'd been up to as they walked back to the castle for dinner, pockets full of rock cakes they were too polite to refuse.

"Fluffy's guarding a philosopher's stone," Harry said.

"A *what* ?"

"A philosopher's stone can turn any metal to gold and produces an elixir that lets you live forever," Harry explained.

"You figured it out?" Ron asked in disbelief.

Harry shook his head. " *I* didn't, not really."

He held up his phone. Ron read through the text exchange:

Heard the name Nicolas Flamel over tea. Sounded familiar. Do you know?

Flamel alchemy research partner of Albus Dumbledore. See chocolate frog card of AD. SH

Google: Flamel's main pursuit philosopher's stone. Wizards: Flamel has only philosopher's stone in existence. SH

FYI: philosopher's stone turns all metal to gold & produces elixir of life, making drinker immortal. SH

By the time Harry showed him the photo of Dumbledore's Chocolate Frog card, which he sent to John and Sherlock in the train, Ron's jaw was hanging somewhere around his collarbone.

"No wonder Dumbledore is keeping the stone guarded. *Anyone* would want it!" said Ron excitedly. "So what do we do now?"

"Nothing," Harry said firmly. "It's bad enough a bunch of first years like us figured it out in a week."

Ron felt a little cheated. "But-"

"Is there anything for us to *do* ?" Harry asked. "We'll just get told off if we said anything to the teachers, and if the dark wizard who broke into Gringotts gets wind that we know this much, he might take us hostage and being a hostage is not fun."

Ron reluctantly agreed. Still, all this mystery solving was quite exciting and he was very keen for another one. It was good thing he had Harry to stop him from doing things based on that feeling, because otherwise he would have taken up Malfoy on his challenge to a wizard duel, and *that* would have been a disaster.

But that was story for another time.

Final Notes : I was actually planning on turning this to a three part interlude of the trio, but then Ron got really, really mouthy. So there will be three chapters instead. I have no idea how long I can keep updating every five days, but I plant to keep it up as long as I am able. Harry knows all the difficult stuff featuring Death and Poisons thanks to Sherlock, but doesn't know mundane things like monkshood. ;-) And the solar charger featured in this fic actually exists. You can buy it off amazon.

A lot of people have trouble picturing SIM!John. So for your imagination, I upload how SiM's John looks in my head (eliminate all spaces): akito-shi . livejournal . com (dash) 2738 .html

Harry and the Fall Full of Debacle

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Six: Harry and the Fall Full of Debacle

If there was one thing Harry promised himself when he prepared for Hogwarts, it was to not look for trouble. He had enough of that after getting kidnapped, held hostage, nearly blown up before his tenth birthday and then spending a year in a London primary school where the kids were both harsher and meaner than the ones in Surrey, blundering around reacting like a short-tempered idiot. He also wanted John to be proud of him, and getting into trouble did *nothing* to achieve that goal.

Harry knew he had his work cut out for him the moment Professor McGonagall called his old name at the Sorting Ceremony. Whispers broke out like wildfire as he trudged to the stool where an old, patched and dirty wizard's hat lay. The last thing he saw before the hat was placed on his head was the sight of the students craning to get a better look at him. Staring at the dark insides of the hat, Harry waited.

"Hmmm," said a small voice. "Difficult, very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind either; and no stranger to loyalty and cunning. There's talent, oh my goodness, *yes*, and a nice goal to use them on. That's very interesting. So where should I put you?"

Harry drew a blank. He certainly didn't feel brave or smart or

whatever in particular.

"How about Slytherin?" said the small voice, "You could be great you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on your way to greatness. There's no doubt about that."

But I don't want to be a great man, Harry thought almost immediately. When he thought of greatness, he thought of Sherlock and Mycroft - great talented men, who were little else. As good as Sherlock could be on occasion, that goodness wouldn't have seen the light of day if it weren't for John mining it out of him. *I want to be a good man,* Harry thought as he pictured John - fearless, dangerous, honest and *kind* .

"A *good* man, eh? It's an impossible business, you know, being good. At least greatness is viable. Still no? Then what about your goal? Hard work and toil will best help you achieve it. Would Hufflepuff interest you?"

Will Hufflepuff help me be a good man ? Harry asked inside his head.

"No. No house can help you on that. But if you're so adamant about it, then it better be GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry removed the hat as a thunderous applause rang the Great Hall. Harry was so relieved that his sorting was over he didn't realize he just revealed himself to Draco Malfoy.

Harry met Malfoy on his second trip to Diagon Alley, on his birthday to be exact, which also happened to be the day Sherlock was let loose upon the poor unsuspecting shoppers and shop keeps of Diagon Alley. Sherlock had dragged them to Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions to purchase everyday wizard robes. As it happened, Malfoy was there too to get outfitted for Hogwarts. Sherlock rattled off-hand that Malfoy was the only scion of an old magic family, of old money and old prestige, raised by his mother, served by actual servants, and well indoctrinated in tradition. It was clear Malfoy took Sherlock as a wizard and his deductions as compliments because he puffed up.

"As you noticed, sir, the Malfoys are one of the oldest magic families," he said, "Not at all like the riffraff Hogwarts is letting in these days. I heard some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get their letter, can you imagine? They really should keep it in the old wizarding families."

John and Harry were cringing in behalf of Malfoy at this point. Sherlock reacted as expected.

"Clearly your isolation from society has left you *blind* and the inbreeding has only exacerbated the condition," Sherlock sneered. "Can't you tell a non-magical even when he standing right in front of you?"

Thus they left Malfoy sputtering and outraged.

"Charming, well done," said John, sighing.

"Why? Disabusing his false notions, isn't that kinder?"

"Sherlock, if you were born a few centuries ago, you would've been *burned*," John declared. "You're more wizard than actual wizards."

Harry forgot about Malfoy until the sorting ceremony, vaguely recognizing him as Sherlock's first Diagon Alley victim when he swaggered up to the Sorting Hat, which screamed 'SLYTHERIN!' after barely touching his head. Then Harry forgot about Malfoy *again* when Professor McGonagall intercepted Harry after Dumbledore dismissed the students, and took him to Hospital Wing for a thorough medical examination. Harry was too depressed to think about anything after Madam Pomfrey, the school matron, said he had to come every Sunday for treatment.

Malfoy remained under Harry's radar until his first Potions class, when Harry was having trouble answering Snape's questions and Malfoy laughed unpleasantly at his predicament. After forgetting Malfoy for the third and final time, Harry came face to face with Malfoy and two other Slytherin boys - both of them big, thick-set and extremely mean looking - when he was out alone exploring the grounds after his first appointment with Madam Pomfrey.

"Is it true?" said Malfoy. "Professor Snape said you're the *real* Harry Potter who vanished more than a year ago."

"Yes," said Harry, flicking his eyes at the two other boys and wondering how Malfoy came to know his 'vanishing' when his disappearance was classified information.

"Oh, this is Crabbe and Goyle," said Malfoy, waving carelessly. "My name is Malfoy. Draco Malfoy."

Harry nodded. He felt a bit at lost. What was he supposed to do in this kind of situation? Malfoy already knew his name and knew of him, like every other student from magic families, though none have plunk themselves in front of Harry like they had every right to.

"I saw you hanging around Weasley, Thomas and Finch-Fletchley," Malfoy said. "You really shouldn't, you know. The Weasleys may call themselves an old wizarding family, but they've got no wizard pride. All they've got is red-hair, freckles and more children than they can afford. As for the mudbloods, they'll only drag you down. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort, Potter. I can help you there."

This time Harry blinked. He didn't know what Malfoy meant by Mudblood, but he could guess from the context. He also supposed he should be angry at Malfoy for insulting his friends, but a year exposure to Sherlock and London completely messed up Harry's ability to react properly to insults.

Then Harry realized Malfoy held out his hand to shake Harry's.

"… Okay, hang on," Harry said, hands resolutely to his sides. "Are you telling me all my friends are worthless and you're better than all of them?"

Malfoy just lifted an eyebrow at this bald-faced statement, as if Harry was being stupid for saying the obvious.

"I think you just showed me who really the wrong sorts are," Harry said. "Thank you for your input."

This time, Draco Malfoy gained a pink tinge to his cheeks.

"I'd be careful if I were you, Potter," he said slowly. "Unless you're a bit politer, you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them, either. You hang around riffraff like Weasleys and Muggles it'll rub off on you."

Harry shrugged. "Good."

Malfoy went even pinker. "Fancying a fight, Potter?" he sneered.

Harry kept his face carefully blank. He *didn ' t* fancy a three-against-one fight, especially against Crabbe and Goyle, who were a lot bigger than him, but to show fear now would only make the fight happen quicker. Harry considered his options: Usually, when he was this hideously outnumbered and outgunned, he had to find a way to make a quick stab at the leader and run like hell.

Crabbe and Goyle were stepping forward, cracking their knuckles, when Harry saw a creature approaching from the forest. It looked like - well, Harry supposed it looked like a horse, except it had long, leathery wings and its body was so fleshless its black coat clung to its skeleton. There was something distinctly dragon-like about its face, and as it got closer, Harry noticed the white, pupil-less eyes that glowed eerily.

"What are you looking at?" said Malfoy, when he noticed Harry was staring a couple of feet above him.

Harry pointed at the creature, which was standing directly behind Goyle. Goyle's long, gorilla-like arm hit its bony chest as he turned around in reaction to the creature's breath ruffling his bristly hair. The beast nabbed Goyle by the scuff and flung him over its shoulder. Goyle crash-landed to the ground. Malfoy and Crabbe looked around wildly, terrified, but didn't notice the beast. Finally, perhaps thinking Harry had done some mysterious magic, they all turned and ran away. Harry watched them go, his mouth hanging open.

"Thank you, horse-thing," said Harry at length, patting the creature's nose. It didn't seem to take much notice, and went straight for Harry's pockets, which had several vials of blood replenishing potion he had to take for his anaemia.

Harry told Ron about the encounter at Lunch time. Ron looked in askance when Harry mentioned the horse-like creature, but had plenty to say about Malfoy.

"I've heard about his family," Ron said darkly. "They were some of the first to come back to our side after You-Know-Who disappeared. Said they'd been bewitched. My dad doesn't believe it. He says Malfoy's father didn't need an excuse to go over the Dark Side."

Since then Malfoy kept looking for opportunities to torment Harry. But unlike his primary school years in Surrey, where he had no one to help him fend off his bullying cousin Dudley, Harry had Ron as a friend, and the first year Gryffindors shared only one class with the Slytherins, so their interaction was limited. At least, it *was* limited until Harry spotted the notice pinned up in the Gryffindor common room that announced flying lessons starting on Thursday-and Gryffindor and Slytherin would be learning together.

"Figures," Harry muttered darkly. "Of course I have to make a fool of myself on a broomstick in front of Malfoy."

He had been looking forward to learning how to fly more than anything (he had been looking forward to Potions, too, and look what happened).

"You don't know that," said Ron reasonably. "Anyway, I know Malfoy's always going on about how good he is at Quidditch, but I bet that's all talk."

Harry would later learn, perhaps not in the way he wished, that Malfoy *was* good at flying, though he'd been mounting brooms the wrong way for years (this puzzled Harry, actually-there was a wrong way to mount *brooms?* Granted they were flying ones…). Neville broke his wrist at flying lessons when he fell off his broomstick twenty feet in the air (Harry could almost hear John's dry voice asking: "So why isn't he dead?"). Soon after Madam Hooch left the lawns escorting the poor tear-streaked Neville to the Hospital wing, Malfoy burst into laughter.

"Did you see his face?"

The Slytherins joined in.

"Shut up, Malfoy!" Parvati Patil snapped.

"Oh, sticking up for Longbottom?" said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl, "Never thought *you 'd* like fat little cry-babies, Parvati."

As the tension escalated, Harry stooped to pick up the Remembrall Neville had got that morning and dropped when he fell off his broom. But another hand snatched it before him. When Harry looked up, Malfoy was holding up the glass ball and had a nasty smile on his face.

"I think I'll leave this somewhere for Longbottom to find," Malfoy drawled. "How about up a tree?"

Harry felt his rage boiling quickly to the surface. He ruthlessly tried to keep it down.

"How are you going to that?" he said, in what he hoped was a fair imitation of what John did to small-time criminals to show they were two seconds away from being eaten for breakfast (they usually got the hint quickly; the others… well, they were eaten - for breakfast).

Malfoy just sneered. He leapt onto his broomstick and took off with practiced ease. *That* was when Harry knew Malfoy wasn't idly boasting about his flying abilities. Malfoy flew towards the trees lining the boarders of the grassy lawn and hovered next to the topmost branches of an oak.

"Come and get it, Potter!" Malfoy shouted.

Harry felt blood pounding in his ears. "You know *everyone* can see what you're doing!" He shouted.

Malfoy laugh derisively and placed the Remembrall precariously between two connected branches. Harry snapped: without thinking, he mounted his broom, kicked hard against the ground and soared to the sky. As the air brushed through his hair and his robes whipped out behind him, Harry realized in a rush of joy he found something he was born to do. Flying was *easy* - it was *wonderful* -

and *no one* needed to teach him. He pulled his broom up to take it up even higher and then turned to face Malfoy. He first thought about javelining into Malfoy, but then decided to go straight after the Remembrall. That was why he was up there anyway, and to Malfoy it would look the same.

Harry leaned forward, grasped the broom tightly between both hands and shot towards Malfoy. He briefly saw the look of fear on Malfoy's face as the other boy barely got out of the away. When he looked back, Harry saw in slow motion the Remembrall slip out of the connected branches, roll off a longer branch and started to free fall. Again, somehow knowing exactly what to do, Harry dipped his broom and turned to port in a corkscrew motion before directing his broom to a steep dive, racing the ball. Wind whistled his ears-people were screaming- he stretched out his hand-the ball was a foot above the ground-and he caught it, just in time to pull up his broom and soar back up again, the Remembrall clutched safely in his fist.

"POTTER! MALFOY!"

He looked down and saw Professor McGonagall running towards them. Harry's heart sank. He slunk back to the ground behind Malfoy, who looked pale.

"Never-in all my time in Hogwarts-" Professor McGonagall was almost speechless, so shocked was she, "-how *dare* you-might have broken your *neck* -" Then she hardened her expression. "Potter, Malfoy, follow me now."

Harry walked numbly after Professor McGonagall. He refused to look at Malfoy, who was furious and sulky. Provoked or not, flying brooms without permission could merit an angry letter to John at least, perhaps even expulsion. Harry felt his innards freeze at the thought of getting expelled. *What would John say?*

They went up the front steps and into the Entrance Hall, where they turned to the left hand corner and stopped at a doorway flanked by two stone gargoyles. Professor McGonagall wrenched open the door and Harry saw a long panelled room full of mismatched, dark wooden chairs and a large wooden wardrobe. Only one person was present and-Harry felt his like stomach was trying to expunge

something large and slimy-it was Professor Snape.

"Professor Snape, I caught Mr. Malfoy flying a school broom against Madam Hooch's orders," said Professor McGonagall. "I brought him to you, his Head of House, so that you may deal with him as you see fit."

Malfoy glared resentfully up at Professor McGonagall, muttering: ' *but I wasn't…'* Snape's black eyes swiftly landed on Harry and they narrowed. Harry put his head down.

"And Potter-" Snape started.

"-was provoked into doing the same," said Professor McGonagall. "As his Head of House, I shall deal with him as *I* see fit."

Snape had nothing to say to that. Malfoy stayed behind, and Professor McGonagall marched Harry up the marble staircase without another word. Harry wondered what she was planning to do as he miserably trotted behind her. He thought about what would happen if he got expelled, and his thoughts landed on the comprehensive he was originally going to attend before Hogwarts entered the picture. He suppose it wouldn't be a complete disaster, he'd see Peter Bradstreet and Rory MacDonald, his first friends at the London primary school, again, but his stomach twisted as he imagined Ron and the others becoming wizards and witches while he was forever banned from the wizarding world.

Professor McGongall stopped outside a classroom. She opened the door and poked her head inside.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment?"

Wood turned out to be a burly fifth year boy, not the cane Professor McGonagall was going to use on Harry. Professor McGonagall marched them into a classroom that was empty except for Peeves the Poltergeist, who was busy writing rude words on the blackboard. She ordered Peeves out, which he did, cursing, and slammed the door behind him.

"Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood, I've found you a Seeker."

From the words that followed, Harry learned Professor McGonagall was so impressed at his flying ability, she wanted him to play for the house Quidditch team, and was letting Oliver, who was Gryffindor's Quidditch house team captain, know. Harry was so relieved that he wasn't going to be expelled, it didn't even occur to him to say anything for or against his placement, or indeed think what the consequences would be. But he did offer token protest for not getting punished.

"I am sure Professor Snape has taken off points from Slytherin," said Professor McGonagall, peering sternly over her glasses at Harry. "So I shall do the same: A point from Gryffindor for allowing others to provoke you. Now I want to hear you're training hard, Potter, or I may rethink my punishment."

Then she suddenly smiled.

"Your father would have been proud," she said. "He was an excellent Quidditch player himself."

Harry told Ron what had happened over dinner, and got a nice view of the half-chewed steak-and-kidney pie in his mouth. Fred and George came over to congratulate Harry for his placement in the team and told him they were on the team too, as Beaters. After they went away, Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle came over.

"Having your last meal, Potter? When are you getting on the train back to the Muggles?"

"I'm assuming you've finished yours and are off to pack your bags," Harry said. He was pretty sure Malfoy wasn't, just as he was sure Snape had taken only taken a single handful of points at most if he took any at all. He'd checked the house points when he entered the Great Hall, and found them more or less the same the last time he checked it. At any rate, Malfoy's face turned pink and ugly at the implied reference of his own punishment.

"You think you're brave, don't you?" said Malfoy, "Talking smart when you're hiding behind the teachers and your little friends. I can

take you on anytime on my own. Tonight, if you want. Wizard's duel. Wands only, no contact. What's the matter? Never heard of wizard's duel before? I supposed you wouldn't, when you hang around trash like Muggles and the Weasleys…"

"Of course he has!" said Ron, wheeling around. "I'm his second, who's yours?"

Malfoy looked at Crabbe and Goyle, sizing them up.

"Crabbe," he said. "We'll meet you in the trophy room at midnight."

When Malfoy was gone, Ron and Harry looked at each other.

"What *is* a Wizard's duel?" said Harry. "And what do you mean, you're my second?"

"Well, a second's there to take over if you die," said Ron casually. Then catching the look on Harry's face, he quickly added, "People only die in proper duels, you know. The most you and Malfoy'll be able to do is send sparks at each other. Neither of you knows enough magic to do any real damage. I bet he expected you to refuse, anyway."

"Then why bother challenging at all? A sneak attack when the teachers aren't looking would probably suit him better…"

"Excuse me."

They both looked up. It was Hermione Granger.

"Can't a person eat in peace in this place?" said Ron.

Hermione ignored him and spoke to Harry.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you and Malfoy were saying-"

"Bet you could," Ron muttered.

"-and you *mustn ' t* go wandering around the school at night, think of the points you'll lose Gryffindor if you're caught, and you're bound to be. It's really very selfish of you. I thought you were better than that,

when you almost didn't take the bait at flying lessons. You know if you waited a bit longer you wouldn't have got into trouble with Professor McGonagall-"

"Yes, I get the point," said Harry. "Thank you."

"Good-bye," said Ron.

They went back to the common room. There, Ron started giving Harry advice such as "If he tries to curse you, you'd better dodge it, because I can't remember how to block them." Harry had to nip it at the bud.

"We're not going," he said.

" *What?* " Ron sputtered. "But this is our chance to beat Malfoy! We agreed to the duel! It's a matter of *honour* !"

" *If* Malfoy shows up," said Harry grimly. "I want to beat him as much as you do, Ron, but I know his type. They promise to meet you and then stab you in the back, so they can watch you get *caught* ."

Ron frowned. "You mean the duel is a trap?"

"Would it surprise you if it was?"

"… No," Ron reluctantly concluded. "It's totally the rotten sort of thing that git Malfoy would do."

"See? No need to give him the satisfaction of expelling us," said Harry. "Who knows? He might actually show up and get *himself* expelled, but I think he's too fond of his own skin to risk it. I reckon the look on his face tomorrow morning is going to be a hoot, whatever the case."

Ron drifted peacefully to sleep on that happy thought. Harry phoned up John that night in the dorm. John agreed it was a wise to do, not going to the midnight duel.

"You'd be letting your enemy choose the time and place of battle," John said. "That gives him too much advantage. Good thing you thought it through. I'm so proud of you."

Harry grinned into the pale moonlight.

He then told John about flying lessons and how he got in the house Quidditch team, the youngest player in about a century. John was as excited at the idea of Quidditch as Harry was ("You play it on *flying broomsticks* ! FLYING! *Broomsticks!* Please tell me you don't have to be a wizard to fly one!"). Sherlock was evidently nearby because he took over the phone and told Harry to *stop* putting ideas in John's head, he's *not* going to waste money buying two flying broomsticks, thanks, now go to sleep don't you have classes tomorrow? Harry grinned again, said goodnight and hung up the phone.

He looked around the dormitory before he got under the covers. Dean and Seamus were sleeping. So was Ron. He noticed Neville's bed was still empty. He checked the clock on his phone, and noted it was half-past eleven. Where was Neville? He remembered seeing him at dinner, so he couldn't be in Hospital wing. Did he forget the password? Was he still *outside* ?

Thinking he'd check, Harry put on his bathrobe and stuck his phone in its pocket. Then he padded down the spiral staircase and entered the Gryffindor common room. A few embers were still glowing in the fireplace, making the armchairs look like dark, hunching boulders. Harry quietly made his way to the portrait hole when a voice spoke from the chair nearest to him, "I can't believe you're going to do this, Harry."

A lamp flickered on. It was Hermione Granger, wearing a pink bathrobe and a frown. Harry covered his face behind his hand.

"Of course it's you."

"I almost told Ron's brother," Hermione snapped, "Percy-he's a prefect, he'd put a stop to this."

Harry couldn't believe anyone could be so interfering and condescending. He knew he could just tell her that he was looking for Neville, point out Ron's absence and so forth, but he didn't feel like it. So he pushed open the portrait of the Fat Lady and peered out. Behind him, Hermione was hissing like an angry goose.

"Don't you *care* about Gryffindor, do you *only* care about yourself, *I* don't want Slytherin to win the house cup, and you'll lose all the points I got from Professor McGonagall for knowing about Switching Spells."

Harry pointed his phone light to one side of the corridor. He saw nothing. He then directed the light to the other side. He saw a lump a few feet away, and it was snuffling. Harry only heard the noise because Hermione paused to take a breath before continuing her shrill monologue:

"-your parents are going to be so disappointed, and don't say that I didn't warn you, you just remember what I said when you're on the train home tomorrow-"

"There you are Neville," Harry said loudly.

Neville suddenly jerked awake from where he'd curled up on the floor, fast asleep.

"Thank goodness you found me! I've been out here for hours, I couldn't remember the new password to get in to bed-the Bloody Baron's been past twice!"

Harry helped Neville scrambled through the portrait hole.

"How's your arm?" Harry asked.

"Fine," said Neville, showing him. "Madam Pomfrey mended it in about a minute."

"Good-I was wondering where you were at, I didn't see you in bed. The new password is 'Pig snout', by the way."

Harry headed back to the boy's dormitory behind a grateful Neville. A few steps in, he looked back at Hermione, who was slack-jawed and speechless.

"Good night," he said quietly. Then Harry turned around and climbed the spiral staircase.

The look of disbelief on Malfoy's face next morning was enough to convince Harry that he was right; the duel *was* a trap. A week later he got a new broomstick via owl post-the latest Nimbus model, one of the fastest brooms on the market. It was beautiful thing, made of a sleek and shiny mahogany handle and long tail of neat, straight twigs. It drove Malfoy mad with envy, much to Ron and Harry's delight. Harry sent several pictures of his new broom to John and Sherlock, and once he taught Ron how to do it, he sent a video of him flying it too (he let Ron fly the broom in return). John was ecstatic, a sentiment Sherlock did not share, surprisingly. He just told Harry to not come home paralyzed, please, as one cannot tell NHS funded hospitals that my child has fallen off a flying broomstick, and taking Harry to a private practitioner would surely decimate their meagre finances. John later told Harry that Sherlock, while liking the idea of flying broomsticks as a means of transport, had no interest in its function as sports vehicle as Sherlock didn't believe in exercise for exercise's sake.

What with Quidditch practice three evenings a week plus classes and homework, the days passed by quickly. Before Harry knew it, he'd already been at Hogwarts for two months. The castle felt like home-not a home away from home, but *home*, like 221B was home. Sure, he missed John and Sherlock, but they were, as promised, only a phone call away. Being able to call Sherlock was particularly helpful. Harry was certain he wouldn't have kept getting high marks without him (and what that said about magic or Sherlock, Harry wanted to know).

Speaking of his phone, Hermione hadn't borrowed it from Harry since the midnight duel that didn't happen. Like a lot of the other Muggle-borns, she liked calling her parents and would borrow his phone at least once a day. But now she avoided him, and refused to speak to him when they couldn't avoid each other. Harry didn't know what made her so. Didn't he stay out of trouble like she wanted? What hacked her off again? Ron, on the other hand, thought it was huge bonus since she was such a bossy know-it-all, and Harry had to agree.

On Halloween morning they woke up to the delicious smell of baking pumpkin wafting the corridors (Harry wondered how this worked;

scenting charms? *V entilation* ?). In charms, Professor Flitwick announced he thought they were ready to start making objects fly. Even Harry, who already knew how to do it, was excited because though he could make things *float* he couldn't make things zoom around the classroom like Professor Flitwick, who made Neville's toad Trevor zoom around the classroom to demonstrate. Professor Flitwick put them in pairs to practice. Harry's partner was Neville Longbottom (he found himself partnering Neville often since the teachers caught on to the fact Neville relaxed more around Harry, thus leading to less accidents and collateral damage). Ron, however, had to work with Hermione Granger, and it was difficult to tell who was angrier about the arrangement.

"Now, don't forget the nice wrist movement we've been practicing," squeaked Professor Flitwick, perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the magic words properly is very important, too-never forget Wizard Baruffio, who said 's' instead of 'f' and found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his chest." (For this Harry was thankful of Sherlock for hounding him on his Latin pronunciation over the summer-he didn't fancy a Tibetan yak sitting on his chest).

Harry let Neville go first. Neville swish and flicked, but the feather they were supposed to be sending skywards just lay on the desktop. Harry had to keep encouraging him to try this or that differently least he be reduced to tears of bewilderment (again). Seamus, two tables down, impatiently prodded his feather with his wand and set it on fire. Ron, at the next table, wasn't having better luck. Harry winced as he watched Ron wave his long arms around like a windmill shouting: *" Win-gar-dium Levio-sa! "*

"You're saying it wrong," Hermione snapped (Harry winced again). "It's Wing- *gar* -dium Levi- *o* -sa, make the 'gar' nice and long."

"You do it, if you're so clever," Ron snarled.

Of course, Hermione did it perfectly and made their feather hover four feet above their heads. Professor Flitwick's delight over her success did nothing to improve Ron's very bad mood, which lasted until the end of class.

"No wonder no one can stand her," Ron said to Harry as they milled out of the charms classroom, "she's a nightmare, honestly."

Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past him. It was Hermione, and she was in tears.

"I think she heard you."

"So?" said Ron, looking uncomfortable despite his words. "She must've noticed she's got no friends."

That struck a painful chord in Harry. That Hermione was friendless hadn't even occurred to him, and Ron didn't even like her and had noticed.

Hermione didn't turn up for the next class and was conspicuously absent for the rest of the afternoon. On their way to the Great Hall that evening, Harry and Ron overheard Parvati tell her friend Lavender that Hermione was crying in the girls' toilet and wanted to be left alone. Ron looked really awkward at this. So was Harry. He wanted to ask John for advice, since John was, you know, despite the name and disposition, but he wasn't sure if it was going to be any help because he couldn't imagine John at any point in life crying for hours in a toilet. The two were mutually exclusive. It simply couldn't exist.

Then they entered the Great Hall, and the Halloween decorations put Hermione right out of their minds…

… Until Professor Quirrell came running in, screaming about a troll in the dungeons before fainting dead away.

Final Notes : Harry forgetting Malfoy until Malfoy makes *sure* he doesn't forget tickled me. Next stop, Hermione!

Hermione and the Troll Incident

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Seven: Hermione and the Troll Incident

John was enjoying a cup of tea by the sitting room table when Albus Dumbledore stepped out from the fireplace that roared with green flames.

"Hello John," said Dumbledore.

"Dumbledore!" John said, smiling. "It's been a while. Please sit."

Dumbledore murmured his thanks as John headed over to the kitchen to fetch another cup of tea. He looked around. A small path was cleared so as to make navigation between the kitchen, the first floor exit, and fireplace possible without stepping on the printouts, magazine clippings and newspapers covering every conceivable surface like so much snow. Though it wasn't the first time Dumbledore had seen the flat in this kind of state, he couldn't help but marvel at Sherlock's ability to create it.

"Oh, *thank you*," John said fervently as Dumbledore put the papers in neat little stacks with a flick of his wand.

They sat by either side of the sitting room table. Dumbledore noted the general air of harassed weariness hovering around John as he accepted his tea.

"Is Sherlock working on a case?" Dumbledore asked.

"No, he is bored," John sighed. "I made the mistake of suggesting he solve the mystery of the magic-immune phone. This is the result."

Dumbledore tried not to laugh. "Indeed. You'll let me know if he makes any headway, won't you?"

"If you like," said John. "Mind, I'm not sure how serious he is about it."

Dumbledore beamed. "Then perhaps Sherlock can look into a little problem I have at hand?"

John was instantly interested. "Which is?"

"Someone let a troll into Hogwarts," said Dumbledore.

John froze for a fraction. Then set the teacup in hand on the table.

"A *troll*," John repeated.

"A mountain troll," Dumbledore confirmed.

"Anyone hurt?"

"Miss Hermione Granger was in the toilet the troll blundered into. But don't worry, she's fine."

"Good. I wasn't sure how I was supposed to break the news to her parents. They've been calling me for status updates every week since she stopped calling them. How did she survive?"

"One of the teachers found the troll wandering around in the dungeons and informed the residents in the Great Hall. Whilst evacuating, Harry and his friend Ron remembered Hermione was in the girl's toilets the whole time, and rushed to tell her. Hermione testifies the troll was about to finish her off by the time they arrived. Harry and Ron distracted the troll by throwing debris at it, which unfortunately made *themselves* a target. I'm not entirely certain how it happened, but Harry somehow pulled Hermione out the corner the troll put her in, and Ron cast a hovering charm on the troll's wooden

club, which knocked out the troll when the charm gave out and fell on its head."

John stared at Dumbledore. "Harry fought the troll."

"Yes."

"When did this happen?"

"Halloween evening."

"So it's been a whole day and he still hasn't told me."

"It's strange what children choose to tell or not tell you."

"I'm going to kill him," John said in a quiet tone. "He has but hours to live."

"I assume you are speaking out of great emotional distress and not sincerity of motive," Dumbledore said serenely. "Don't be unduly distressed. No children were harmed from the incident, and a friendship was forged from its fire-I have yet to see Harry, Ron and Hermione separately since."

"Really?" said John, eyebrow cocked. "That's funny, because the last I heard, Hermione was giving the boys the silent treatment, and Harry was enjoying it like it was some kind of extended holiday."

Dumbledore's moustache quivered. "Apparently one cannot help but end up liking one another when twelve-foot trolls are involved."

"Or out finding serial-killing cabbies," John muttered.

Dumbledore's eyebrows jumped to his hairline. "That sounds like quite a tale!"

"It is. I'll tell you about it later. Now about that person you wanted me to train…"

Hermione tried very hard not to think about the troll, her month-long

silence, or calling her parents. She couldn't imagine the conversation that would ensue if she did, especially after Harry told her the number of times her parents had called him and asked if they were still fighting.

Of course, she couldn't avoid it indefinitely. Harry checked his phone that afternoon in the common room and paled.

"It's John," he whispered, staring at a text. "She knows: *So what is this thing about a troll?* "

Hermione squeaked. "How did she find out?"

"I don't know!" Harry sputtered. "I never said anything!"

They sat there exchanging terrified looks. Ron tried to reason with them.

"C'mon, your parents won't actually pull you two out of Hogwarts, would they? I mean it's not your fault the troll got in."

Hermione fisted her hair. "I don't think my parents would want me to stay in a school where trolls *can* get in."

"At least they haven't found out yet," Harry said hollowly. "I'm *doomed* ."

Just then Harry's phone bleeped. They read the message:

Conference call at 5PM. Grangers are calling in. Tell Hermione to be there.

Hermione wanted to cry. " *No!* "

The phone bleeped twice. Harry shakily checked the next two messages:

FYI: Sherlock & Dumbledore suspect foul play regarding troll. Sherlock will text you. Tell him the details.

Also tell Hermione her parents will not pull her out of Hogwarts because of troll. Ditto to you.

Hermione was so relieved she actually *did* cry. She was still sniffling when they went to visit Hagrid soon after.

"There, now, why're yeh cryin'?" Hagrid asked as he welcomed them in.

Harry explained how he and Hermione had decided not to tell their parents about the troll least they think Hogwarts regularly had trolls rampaging about, that somehow John heard about it, and that they were just told they weren't going to be pulled out of Hogwarts because of it, thus Hermione was crying from relief.

"S'always harder fer Muggle parents," Hagrid said sagely. "They jus' don' know what's normal and what s'not fer magic folk. Mind, a lot o' witches and wizards would get upset if their first-year kid fought a troll."

Ron looked away guiltily.

"Oh, this is Hermione," said Harry as Hagrid prepared tea.

"A new friend?" said Hagrid, eyes crinkling with a smile. "I'm Hagrid, but yeh already know that. So I hear you're the cleverest witch of yer year?"

Hermione felt herself turn burning red. "Well…"

"Would be a shame if yeh had ter leave Hogwarts when yer so brilliant," Hagrid went on. "Professor McGonagall fer one would have words with yeh and yer parents if yeh do."

Hermione thought she'd just catch fire if she turned any redder.

"Same fer you, Harry," said Hagrid. "Tho' if yeh keep walking so close to the forest, Professor McGonagall migh' have differen' words with yeh."

"Oh, you knew about that?" Harry said blushing. Then he told Ron and Hermione about his solo walks on the Hogwarts grounds every Sunday.

"Harry! You're not actually *entering* the forest are you?" Hermione

exclaimed.

"No, no, I never entered," said Harry hastily.

"Why d'yeh keep walkin' aroun' on yer own, anyway?" asked Hagrid.

"I *like* walking around," said Harry, "John and I used to take long walks together."

"I can't believe you didn't ask me join," Ron said crossly. "I would've come, you know."

Harry blushed again. "Sorry. It's such an old-person hobby, and not a lot of people like it. I didn't think… well, I told Ron about Surrey Zoo bombing. Hermione, you heard about it, right?"

She did. It was all over the news last year-thirteen dead and over fifty wounded.

"You were there?"

Harry nodded.

"Yeah. Anyway, while I was sitting there thinking I was going to die, I kept regretting: why did I waste my time waiting for good things to happen? I could've used that time to savour the good things I do have. Since then I got this habit of just -going ahead."

The hut fell silent at that confession. Hermione didn't know what Ron was thinking, but she remembered thinking some very similar thoughts that fateful Halloween evening when she wasn't paralyzed with fear. She also often wondered why Harry, while clearly making an effort to do well in school, never put that extra effort to do everything perfectly. Now it made sense: he was simply not allowing school work to overtake his life so he could savour *life* .

"… Thought it migh' be summat like that," said Hagrid gruffly. "Jus' don be too reckless, tha's all I'm sayin'."

"I won't," said Harry. "I don't go looking for trouble. I get enough of that without trying."

"You got that one right," Ron said, chuckling. "I haven't had so many things happening to me my entire life until I met you. So far we've accidentally opened the out-of-bounds corridor and fought a troll without meaning to. Wonder what we'll end up doing next?"

"You sound like you look forward to it," Harry said.

"Well, yeah, it's really exciting," Ron said.

"… Excuse me," Hermione interrupted. "But did you just say you two opened the out-of-bounds corridor?"

"It was an accident!" Harry protested. "We thought it was the door to the charms corridor!"

"Yeah, we never went back since then!" said Ron.

Hermione could only shake her head. It appeared she was going to live a very dangerous and exciting life as long as Ron and Harry were her friends. But she didn't mind. She wouldn't trade this warmth and welcomed for anything.

… Except perhaps getting yelled at her parents in front of her new friends.

The conference call was a miserable affair: Hermione's mother told her off for being so stubborn, and her father chided her for not writing. They brushed aside Ron's apologies for making her cry and Harry's insistence he had been a prat, saying that was entirely beside the point.

"Now, I don't another episode like this," said her mother sternly. "I know you were lonely and upset, but that doesn't mean you can be passive-aggressive. Am I clear?"

"Yes, Mum," Hermione said, wiping fresh tears.

They left Hagrid's soon after the call. Harry and Ron stared at each other awkwardly for a beat.

"I don't feel like going to the Great Hall," said Harry at length. "Want to go to the kitchens?"

"Yeah, that's a good idea," Ron said quickly.

Hermione sniffled. "You've been there before?" She wasn't sure if going to the kitchens were against the rules, but she didn't fancy showing up for dinner all red-eyed and blotchy.

"No, but we know where it is," said Ron. "Fred and George told us last week. Let's go check it out."

The kitchens were in the dungeons, but unlike the underground passageway which led to potions classrooms, the stone steps they took brought them to a brightly lit, broad stone corridor decorated with cheerful paintings that were mainly of food.

"Look for a door or a painting big enough to be a door," Harry said. The twins hadn't told them the actual entrance.

They found a painting showing a gigantic silver fruit bowl. There weren't any other doors.

"Usually you have to tickle the right spot for doors like these," said Ron. "It should be eye-level. C'mon…"

They tickled every fruit they could reach, and hit jackpot when Harry tickled the huge green pear. It squirmed, chuckling, and suddenly turned into a large green door handle.

"Don't you think it would be great if there was a 3D map of Hogwarts?" Harry said as he seized the door handle and pulled. "Tells you how to open a door, where you are, how to get where…"

"It would definitely stop you from opening forbidden corridors thinking it's the Charms classroom," said Ron. Then he stopped. "*Whoa*…"

Beyond the painting was an enormous, high-ceilinged room, large as the Great Hall above it. Mounds of glittering brass pots and pans heaped around the stone walls, a great brick fireplace was at the other end and four long wooden tables were positions exactly

beneath the four House tables above in the Great Hall. But what grabbed their attention were the hundred or so tiny creatures beaming, bowing and curtsying at them. They all seemed to have long, bat like ears, enormous tennis-ball-shaped eyes, and short and skinny limbs. Another common feature was their uniform: a tea towel stamped with the Hogwarts crest tied like a toga.

Harry blinked several times. "Hello," he said.

"What *are* you?" Ron blurted out.

"House-elves, sir," squeaked one of the creatures. "We is just house-elves."

"… Oh," said Harry. He looked as lost as Ron and Hermione felt.

"Is there anything we can do for you, Sirs and Miss?" asked another elf.

"Oh, um," Harry started scratching his head. "Well, we were hoping to get an early dinner. So if you don't mind and if it isn't too much trouble for you-"

He didn't get to finish. The house-elves happily ushered them to a small table. Once they were seated, six house-elves came bearing a large silver tray loaded with food, a large pitcher of pumpkin juice and three goblets.

"Good service!" said Ron in an impressed tone. The house-elves beamed and bowed again before retreating.

They sat there munching on sandwiches and shepherd's pie. As they ate, a troop of house-elves placed plates, soup pots, ladles and cutlery on the four long tables, while the rest prepped the food. With a snap of a finger, the platters and pots were filled with food. Another snap and the whole lot vanished, presumably appearing on the tables above.

"That was *amazing*," said Harry, wide-eyed.

A red blushing tide spread across the elves. One of the stammered, "This is nothing, sir! Just a simple spell!"

"No really, I mean it. You lot are amazing," Harry insisted.

A few of the house-elves actually burst into tears, so touched were they at the compliment. The rest were bowing so low they noses were touching the ground.

"I think you should stop, Harry," said Ron, grinning. "You might give them a big head."

"What else do you do besides kitchen work?" Harry asked as the elves took away their plates, and placed different kinds of desserts.

"We take care of the castle, sir!" squeaked a house-elf. "Just little things like cleaning, airing and the laundry!"

"Ooh, so you're the ones taking care of the laundry, I wondered about that," said Hermione.

"Yeah, didn't seem like a job for Filch," Ron said thickly (he started on a cream cake).

"Oh no, sir, no. Mr. Filch only cleans the halls," said the elf from before (Hermione wondered he/she/it was a spokes-elf of sorts). "We is responsible for the classrooms, common rooms, dormitories and the fireplaces."

"Do you take care of the food stock, too?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, Miss!" squeaked the (hypothetical) spokes-elf. "Mr. Hagrid and Professor Sprout grow the vegetables, and we take care of the produce!"

"What about the meat?" Ron asked.

"We get a shipment every week, sir."

"I see," Hermione said. She never thought this was how Hogwarts operated on a day-to-day basis. She had always assumed there was a human staff working behind the scenes, just like the Muggle counterparts, except they used magic. Obviously she was wrong.

"Is there anything else we can do for you, Sirs and Miss?" asked the

spokes-elf.

Harry was about to shake his head, when Ron nudged him.

"Didn't you want to ask them about that pizza thing?" Ron said.

"Oh! Well, yeah, but it's kind of-" said Harry.

But the elves already heard them. They clamoured around Harry asking what Ron meant by pizza. Harry showed them a photograph from his phone.

"I had this every weekend in London," Harry explained. "I love your cooking, I really do, but I do miss this."

"That's a lot of pizza, Harry," Hermione remarked.

"I basically lived on takeaway," said Harry ruefully. "Sherlock thinks eating is a nuisance, and John only eats to stave off hunger. Neither of them cooked. If it weren't for Mrs. Hudson, I wouldn't have had any homemade food."

"That's kind of sad," said Ron.

"I don't mind. I'd rather spend the rest of my life eating takeaway than not live with Sherlock and John," said Harry, very seriously.

The ferocity in which Harry said those words made Hermione wonder what kind of people Harry lived with before John and Sherlock. Harry certainly never spoke of them. In fact, he treated his life before John and Sherlock as if it didn't exist. Clearly those years weren't happy ones.

As for the elves, they did a curious thing: they asked permission to tap Harry's tongue so they could get a sense of the taste he was seeking. After doing so a few times, they told Harry they would have it ready by next week.

"I really appreciate this," said Harry. "What are your names, by the way?"

The spokes-elf's name was Blippy and that was about the only

name and face they remembered after Blooper, Keepy, Snoopy (really?), Plocks and Cobby. When they were done, Harry's eyes were completely glazed over.

"Right. Thank you so much everyone," he said.

They said good-bye to the elves, who pressed in upon them with extra snacks and cakes to take back upstairs. Then the little elves clustered around the door to bid them good night with many more bows and curtseys.

"You know," said Ron as they climbed the stairs back to entrance hall. "I've heard about house-elves before, but I've never actually met one until today. Weird things, aren't they?"

"It was a bit uncomfortable, all that bowing and curtseying," said Hermione. "It was like they were servants and we were their masters."

"They were definitely happy to serve," said Harry. "I wonder if they can really make a pizza just based on my memory of its taste. I mean, everyone remembers taste a bit differently, don't they?"

"If they can, it would be a really amazing bit of magic," said Hermione. "Extracting regular memory is complicated enough, but just sense-perception memory! House-elves are really amazing creatures. It makes you wonder why they aren't mentioned in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* ."

"Perhaps they're beings?" Harry said.

"Maybe," said Hermione, thinking hard. "But *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* mentioned other beings too."

Just then Harry's phone bleeped. Harry took a look at the new text and turned grim.

"It's Sherlock. He wants the details."

"What kind of details?" Ron asked eagerly.

"Who came in after the troll got knocked out and what they did."

"Well, that's straightforward," said Ron. "McGonagall, Snape, and Quirrell came in after we knocked out the troll. McGonagall blew a gasket. Quirrell kind of whimpered and sat down."

"And Snape," said Harry grimly. "Had a bite mark on his leg."

"Excuse me, Minerva, but I can't help but notice the distinctly international flair of the Gryffindor table's cuisine."

That was Professor Flitwick's squeaky comment on a Saturday afternoon about a week after the troll incident. Professor McGonagall looked over to her house table and saw Harry Potter eating a large slice of margarita pizza.

"I believe Potter and his two cronies have discovered the kitchens," said Professor Snape as he glared at the Gryffindor table, where Dean Thomas was flapping his hand in front of his face, teary-eyed, after putting a large spoon of spicy korma into his mouth. "Potter and Weasley have been caught handing out pastries more than once. What we see right now is no doubt the result of Potter making special requests to the house-elves."

"Well, what's wrong with that?" said Professor Sprout indulgently as Ron Weasley prodded a plate of Pad Thai with a dubious look on his face. "Entering the kitchens is not against the rules, and it's difficult for students to leave without treats once they do. And Mr. Potter no doubt missed the exotic food he had in London."

Snape gave a baleful look at Sprout, but didn't say anything. McGonagall noticed he was again drinking a cup of black aromatic liquid that was definitely not tea.

"Speaking of international cuisine," said McGonagall. "What are you drinking, Severus?"

"Coffee," Snape answered.

"I've been wondering why you stopped drinking tea," McGonagall remarked. "Why change?"

"You've stopped drinking tea?" cried Flitwick. "What's wrong with the traditional British morning cuppa?"

"It doesn't wake me up," said Snape, as if that settled the issue.

While the teachers debated the merits of tea verses coffee, Justin Finch-Fletchley and several Hufflepuffs came over to the Gryffindor table. They were waving cricket bats. Dumbledore, who had been dividing his attention between an article on a rather lurid case of Muggle-baiting and the students, smiled as Dean Thomas jumped to his feet with a football clutched to his side. He and Seamus Finnigan joined the throng of Hufflepuffs, hollering at Harry and Ron to hurry up. Ron dived under the table and pulled out an oblong ball as Harry wiped his mouth.

Dumbledore remembered the loud argument that broke out between the Muggle-raised Gryffindor and Hufflepuff first years and their Magic-raised counterparts on Muggle sports: Justin extolled the virtues of cricket, Dean raved about football, and Harry exerted his continued fondness for rugby despite his new fascination for Quidditch. The students from magic families, Ron in particular, couldn't see what was exciting about games that only had one ball and no one was allowed to fly. Apparently the first years had taken Harry's suggestion that they all see for themselves the merits of Muggle ball games to heart.

"Come on, Neville, Hermione, you too!" rang Harry's voice.

Hermione sighed and put away her book. Neville Longbottom hesitated for a second before getting up. The first years ran out of the Great Hall like a tidal wave. Dumbledore caught a glimpse of Neville's side profile before they made a complete exit. The boy's round face was shining with joy.

Dumbledore returned his paper, smiling. It wasn't very often he saw something so beautiful these days.

Final Notes : Hermione's part was rewritten four times. I just couldn't make it interesting enough, though I was very fond of some

individual passages. The above was the best I could do. As always, thank you so much for your kind reviews. Your thoughts, comments and criticism mean a great deal to me.

ETA: Merry Christmas, everyone!

The Perils of Deduction

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Eight: The Perils of Deduction

Severus regarded his opponent warily. His opponent circled around him, poised to strike. Severus knew he had little chance of winning, but he couldn't escape. He willingly got into this mess, so it was his job to get out of it.

" *Impedimenta*," he whispered as he quickly stepped sideways, his next hex on his lips.

But his opponent was quicker. The curse was avoided using only the smallest of movements. Before Severus could adjust his aim, his opponent already was upon him. A quick grip, a powerful throw, and Severus hit the ground hard. On the next beat, his wand arm was outstretched between two strong legs that pinned him down and his hand was twisted so viciously he let go of his wand. Severus tapped the ankle twice to signal his submission.

"Don't stop fighting just because you're down, Snape," Watson chided.

Severus groaned when he was released. As he felt the aches and pains in his body, which was no longer young or, indeed, built for this sort of activity, Severus had to remind himself why he had to go through this.

On the evening after the guided tour in Diagon Alley, Severus brought up the subject of Muggles skilled in martial arts to Dumbledore. After witnessing Watson's memorable demonstration, it had occurred to Severus that a highly trained Muggle who had even a rudimentary understanding of magic may trump a wizard in a fight, and easily bypass wards only designed to prevent magical attacks. It was a security hole Severus couldn't afford to overlook, and one the Ministry of Magic may not take seriously since it gave Muggles more credit than they were accustomed to giving. Dumbledore agreed, and suggested they ask Watson for help after he finished warding 221B. Watson was bemused but interested, especially when Dumbledore insisted on paying tuition. Watson warned them the training would neither be easy nor pleasant, so the trainee better be up for the challenge. Then Watson asked who was going to be the (un)lucky trainee.

"Why, Severus of course!" said Dumbledore cheerfully. "He's the youngest and most fitting of my people!"

Severus's outraged protests were duly ignored.

But the Headmaster had a point. Severus *was* the youngest qualified and available wizard Dumbledore trusted. He also had not inconsiderable knowledge and experience in wizard duelling, especially its darker aspects, which would give Watson a better idea of what to expect in a fight against dark wizards and curtail the attacks accordingly.

So there he was, travelling to London each week - minus a week break after Halloween due to three-headed beast dog induced injuries - to be thrown, kicked or grappled to the ground by Watson without once getting a successful curse. It was maddening.

"Okay, let's wrap up," Watson announced, "Wide push-ups. Two sets of fifty."

Severus cursed. He cursed again when he couldn't get up after number forty-six. Watson finished all one hundred wide push-ups in a disturbingly short period of time.

"Your cardio is improving," said Watson. "You still need more weight

training. Work on those legs."

"This is too much," Severus grumbled to the floor.

"Well, we *are* building from ground zero," said Watson. "What was that spell, by the way? Some kind of obstruction curse judging from the incantation."

"It will slow you down to a halt."

"Brrrr," Watson shivered. "That's a good one. I would've been a sitting duck if I got hit."

"Why don't you try fighting while you're cursed?" Severus groused.

"No thanks. I rather like beating you up," Watson flashed a grin before turning serious. "You're still pulling your punches, Snape. I haven't seen you cast spells that would cut me to ribbons or vanish half of my organs-and don't tell me there aren't curses like that or that you don't know how to cast them."

It was disturbing how much battle intuition Watson had. Severus was willing to bet the Powers Above made Watson a Muggle because otherwise the world would have had a harmless-looking undefeatable monster on its hands.

"Do all spells travel like a beam of light?" Watson asked as Severus hobbled over to the sitting room table (a longer trek than usual, as the sitting room was magically expanded and warded to accommodate flying curses and flying Snapes). "It'll be a lot harder to avoid spells with an effective area that looks like a wide cone."

Severus thought about it as he sat down. It wasn't something *he* would've considered, but it made perfect sense that a Muggle, whose best weapons were speed and distance, would think about it.

"Most of them do travel like beams of light, except perhaps the Killing Curse," said Severus before adding: "If you ever hear the words ' *Avada Kedavra* ', find hard cover."

"Unblockable?" asked Watson.

"Very," said Severus.

Watson shivered "Duly noted. Okay, Snape, refuel."

Severus regarded the-what did Watson call it, a smoothie?-in front of him with a mixture of disdain and nausea.

"Food is part of the training," said Watson sternly. "Drink up."

Severus reluctantly put the straw between his lips. The cold mixture tasted fruity, grassy and strongly celery-in short, disgusting.

"So how is Harry doing?" Watson asked with a smirk.

"Don't ask if you don't want a slow acting poison in your tea."

"Still at it then."

Severus covered his face. "If he intends to create the sort of potions I *think* he wants to create, you're not long for this world. Why on earth does he want to regrow your internal organs?"

"I don't know, because some of them are missing?"

Severus had to look up for that. " *What* ?"

"Well, I'm missing a kidney," said Watson, ticking off fingers, "and part of my liver. My digestive tract had to be shortened when I got caught in an IED, and then there's my-"

"Why are you still alive?" Severus interrupted rudely.

Watson shrugged. "I ask myself that question every now and then. It's not fun, you know, living with intermittent pain. Speaking of," Watson gave Severus a frankly astonished look, "What the *heck* are you putting in those pain relief potions? I took some the other day then accidentally shoved Dimmock. He basically *flew* into two SOCOs, knocked them down, and then all three of them went skidding. I mean, it's freaking *amazing*, and I'm really, really grateful for the relief, but stuff like that is hard to explain."

Severus outwardly sniffed as he inwardly trembled. Ever since his

training started, Severus had an idea that both fascinated and terrified him, therefore wouldn't leave him alone: how powerful would a fully healed Watson be? The current Watson would probably continue to trounce him unless he used an Unforgivable or if he caught Watson unawares. This plus the fact that Watson was capable of defeating Aurors *before* Dumbledore healed the damaged left shoulder almost guaranteed a completely healed Watson in battle would be a sight to behold. Though Severus was aware a healthier Watson would translate to more pain for him at the very least and prosecution for unlawful use of magic at worst, he couldn't help but meddle in Watson's recovery if only to see what Watson was capable of. That he owed Watson Potter's continued existence or that he found Watson's company surprisingly tolerable had nothing to do with it.

"The potion is supposed to address the *cause* of pain, not just numb it like your Muggle medications," said Severus dismissively. "Lower the dosage if it worries you. Now I would appreciate it if you told your child NOT to attempt potions that are beyond his plebeian little brain and he backed off his unfounded suspicion that I have designs to murder him. It's hard enough to save his bloody neck when he's not determined to get himself killed."

"Sherlock is talking to Harry. He'll mention you at some point," said Watson. "No comments on Harry's plebeian little brain since I know you're horribly biased. It would only help if you stop being such a bastard."

"Yes, and pigs shall fly without the benefit of a hover charm," Severus snarled. "I don't *do* nice, Watson!"

Watson just laughed merrily, "Same time next week?"

Severus groaned. Bastard!

Meanwhile, back in Hogwarts, three first years were out in the courtyard, shivering against the cold winds, as they huddled around a ball of blue flames and a mobile phone. The three were Harry, Ron and Hermione, and they were holding a teleconference with Mr.

Sherlock Holmes.

"We have more evidence against Snape!" said Ron in a rush. "Snape was jinxing Harry's broom at the Gryffindor-Slytherin match!"

Sherlock let out a gusting sigh. "Don't tell me what you *think* . Tell me what you *saw* ."

"I know a jinx when I see one!" said Hermione hotly. "I've read all about them! You've got to keep eye contact, and Snape wasn't blinking at all!"

"So you saw Snape's mouth moving and his eyes fixed on Harry, and Harry's broom acting abnormally during the match, is that correct?"

"YES!" said Ron and Hermione together.

"Describe the broom's abnormal behaviour."

"It tried to throw me off," said Harry. "Bucking and twitching. Flying up when I didn't even directed it to. And it vibrated a lot."

"Do you *know* what exactly Snape was saying?"

"No, but it's obvious, isn't it?" said Ron.

"THINK!" rang Sherlock's voice. "What profit is it to Snape to be at a Quidditch game, where most of Hogwarts are present, when the castle itself is nearly empty and the object of interest is still there?"

" *Oh!* " the three exclaimed.

"Exactly," said Sherlock snidely. "So what should you be looking for?"

"The people who *weren't* at the Quidditch match!" said Hermione excitedly. Then she deflated. "I don't think anyone was paying attention to *that*…"

"We could ask around," said Harry.

"That's going to be fun," Ron muttered. "Hey, were you at the Slytherin-Gryffindor Quidditch match? If you weren't, aren't you mighty suspicious…"

"Can we eliminate most of the students?" asked Harry. "Hagrid said only powerful dark magic could tamper a broomstick like my Nimbus, and you'd have to know a lot of magic in order to do that."

"That's reasonable," said Sherlock. "The thief is an adult, most likely an insider considering how quickly he or she was able to ascertain the object of interest is in Hogwarts and navigate around security, though an outsider with an insider ally can't be disregarded. Now-" Sherlock started to sound stern. "I want you three to *stop* making the same plebeian assumptions the police are so fond of making. You saw Snape head to the third floor on Halloween and then saw him with a bite mark on his leg. Base on this you *assumed* he was trying to get past Fluffy and let a troll in to create a diversion, when all you can *deduce* from the data is that he likely entered the forbidden corridor *when* the troll was let in. As I said before, there are two possibilities: either he was checking security or trying to bypass it. Do not deduce more than what the data presents, and do NOT let your emotions colour your deductions. *Understand* ?"

"Yes sir," Harry, Ron and Hermione said, subdued.

Harry ended the call, just as he noticed Snape limping over to where they were. Hermione quickly scooped up the blue flames into a jar and hid it under her robes.

"And what are you three young Gryffindors like yourselves doing out here in a day like this?" Snape asked silkily.

Harry was tempted to say 'enjoying life', but decided he'd rather not risk fifty points from Gryffindor when Snape was obviously in a bad mood and looking for an excuse to tell them off.

"Just calling my parents, sir," said Harry, showing him the phone.

Snape narrowed his eyes at Harry, like he always did when Harry didn't give him any excuse to take off points. Harry calmly looked back, confident in his innocence.

"Get inside-and a point from Gryffindor for your cheek, Potter."

"Cheek, is that his excuse?" Harry muttered angrily as Snape limped away. "Why is he still limping anyway, the bite from Fluffy must have healed by now."

"Dunno, but whatever it is, I hope it hurt him more than Fluffy," said Ron bitterly.

The Gryffindor tower was very noisy that evening. Fred and George had set off fireworks in a fit of boredom, and filled the entire common room with smoke and bouncing, star-shaped sparkles. The atmosphere suited Harry. People either too busy watching the fireworks or wadding their way through the smoke, so no one paid attention to his, Ron and Hermione's serious conversation.

They first discussed how they were going to find out who wasn't present at the Gryffindor-Slytherin match. The problem was *how* they were going ask, since the question could come off very badly. If Harry asked, he might look like a right prat who wanted to make sure everyone saw him play. Ron and Hermione didn't have this problem, but if they asked a stranger, the person might become suspicious. Even if they used the pretext of gushing over the game, doing it naturally required a very special kind of person. As much as Ron loved Quidditch, he didn't have the kind of reputation to make it look normal. Hermione they couldn't even consider-it was way too out of character.

"I guess asking people directly is out," said Ron. "So what do we do?"

"How about lifting fingerprints from the broom shed?" Harry suggested.

"No, that won't work," said Hermione. "Too many people have access, and the thief doesn't *have* to touch anything to jinx your broom."

They ran out of ideas very quickly. So they gamely tried to finish

their Transfiguration homework instead (not so gamely for Hermione) as they watched the twins set off dungbombs on top of the fireworks.

Harry suddenly put down his quill.

"Fred and George."

Ron looked up. "What about them?"

"What if Fred and George went around looking for the people who weren't at the Quidditch match?" Harry said. "They have the right kind reputation, and people might cooperate so they can be part of the prank. Even if people *don't*, they're definitely resourceful enough work around it."

Hermione looked terribly worried while Ron looked terribly excited.

"I don't know Harry," said Hermione. "It could go *very* wrong, and how are we supposed to explain the situation?"

"We don't have to tell them everything!" said Ron, warming into the idea. "We can just tell them we want to find the git who jinxed Harry's broom and let them know the person probably didn't go to the match to avoid suspicion!"

"The trick is convincing them Snape *isn't* the culprit *because* he was acting suspicious," said Harry. "Tall order, I know, but we can't have them barking up the wrong tree."

Hermione thought about it.

"This might work," she said. "Let's tell them we think someone jinxed your broom before the match. This person wanted us to blame Snape. Since performing a curse or a counter-curse looks the same from a distance, the person put a jinx only Snape would know how to counter and didn't go to the match to make Snape take the blame."

That was the story they told Fred and George later in the evening. Unfortunately, the twins were sharper than they were when it came to sniffing out flaws in a story.

"The person could've been at the match to make sure Harry's broom was jinxed properly *and* avoid suspicion," Fred pointed out. "And seeing your work up close and personal is just more satisfying."

"You might have a point about Snape, though," said George. "It's *too* obvious, and the chances of getting caught are too high. That's not his style."

In the end they got Fred and George's cooperation. They were bored anyway, and looking for the person who almost made them lose a Quidditch match was their idea of fun. Harry made them promise not to do anything unless they got definite names.

"I just don't want another repeat of the last match," Harry told them. "As long as the person doesn't do it again, I'm okay. I don't want revenge or anything."

" *You* might not want revenge, but *we* do," said Fred.

"Don't worry. We won't hurt them. Much," grinned George.

Harry didn't believe those words for one minute. But he did trust the twins to pull something quite spectacular.

In a week, Fred and George brought in the results.

"It was quite simple, really," said Fred smugly. "We first checked the tally sheet up in the Quidditch stands office."

"There's a tally sheet? Why?" Ron asked.

"To accommodate the spectators," said George. "Seating capacity of the Quidditch stands is normally two hundred fifty, but if there are more people, the stands are spelled to increase. The sheet adds up all the people in the stands and once it goes beyond a certain number, it triggers an extension charm."

"That's very clever," said Hermione.

"Why, thank you, Hermione," said Fred. "Anyway, the sheet recorded two hundred-eighty three people in the last match, so that means practically everyone was there. Of course the sheet can't tell

you *who* was there. That's where these come in."

The twins produced what looked like a pair of brass binoculars that had all sorts of weird knobs and dials, and a stack of wizard photos.

"This is an omniocular," said George, holding up the binoculars, "It can record, play-back, slow-down and zoom-in whatever you see. This *particular* omniocular belongs to Roger Davies and he recorded the entire game so the Ravenclaw Quidditch team can study it later. He let us borrow it once we told him there's someone out there jinxing brooms and he might've recorded who."

They took turns looking at the match recorded in the omnioculars. It just was like looking at a Muggle video, only you had to twiddle the replay knob to change the sequence. Harry watched himself hanging on for dear life as his broom bucked around hundred feet in the air, and choke on the snitch he almost swallowed at the end of the game.

"And these are-" Harry said, pointing at the photos.

"Photos of the match-the *spectators* of the match, to be exact," said Fred.

"You triggered a photo craze Harry," said George, grinning. "Ever since you started walking around taking photos of everything, people started carrying cameras everywhere too."

Harry felt dazed. He started a photo fad? *Him?*

"We figured someone might've taken photos of the match," said George. "The Ravenclaws were pretty good about sharing theirs. They actually thought one of the Slytherins might be jinxing Harry's broom, so they snapped photos of the spectators for evidence. We went through the photos and we think most of the students were there, except for Laura Lyons and Nathan Garrideb. They're accounted for: Laura had to stay in the Hospital wing for shingles and Nathan is harmless-he just never leaves the castle if he can help it."

"That just leaves the teachers and staff," said Fred. "Most of them

weren't there. Sprout wasn't there, Flitwick wasn't there-he usually doesn't go, he almost got trampled the last time-Trelawney, Quirrell, Vector, Madam Pomfrey… really, it's easier to count those who *were* : Just Burbage, Hagrid, Snape and McGonagall."

Harry shared a brief look with Ron and Hermione.

"Did you find anyone who had their wand out?" asked Hermione.

"We checked, but it was hard to make out that kind of detail so we gave up," said Fred. "The jinx could've been time-triggered anyway-delayed just long enough so the match wouldn't get cancelled. Anyway, that's what we found."

The five of them fell silent. It was a good amount of information, and Fred and George did a sterling job collecting it. But it wasn't enough. They never suspected the thief was a student, so it wasn't surprising almost all of them were accounted for. But the teachers and staff, their main pool of suspects, there was still too many to consider even after eliminating the four teachers Fred mentioned. Who could it be?

"Could it have been one of the teachers?" said George. He sounded worried.

Harry bit his lower lip. "I don't know what to think," he said honestly.

They went to bed on that uncertain note. Harry stayed up late into the night brooding over the problem. More than ever, he felt his respect for Sherlock rising. How did Sherlock navigate around so much uncertainty? And how did he stay focused on a case for so long? Harry was already feeling tired of it.

Harry didn't know when he fell asleep, but he woke up next morning breathing in the unique scent of heralding snow. The message was clear:

Christmas was coming.

Final Notes : writing Snape's POV is just too much fun. John is a

friend to all snarky and brilliant men. The trio is plodding their way through the mystery-it's just too bad we already know the solution… or do we?

Desires of the Heart

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Nine: Desires of the Heart

Harry stepped into the snow covered courtyard. His shoes quickly got buried under the white stuff. The skies were pale grey from clouds that had been overcast since mid-December. He let out a puff of air and watched the white mist get swallowed up by the frigid air. As he continued to stare at the sky, he saw a lonely grey owl battle its way to the castle, tumbling a few times mid-air when a sudden bitter wind ripped through. The parcel it bore harked Harry's thoughts back to Christmas and the upcoming holidays.

When Harry thought about the Christmas holidays, he imagined himself returning to London, sitting in Hogwarts Express recalling his first real Christmas: On Christmas Eve, Sherlock kept removing the lights John put up, the skull sported a jaunty Santa hat and Christmas roses were stuck in its eye sockets, holly adorned the mantelpiece, a tiny Norwegian spruce sat next to the fireplace bare of any decorations except a miserable-looking pound shop star, and Sherlock's chemistry set was decorated with the ornaments that were supposed to go on the tree. On Christmas day, John had somehow in the middle of the night transformed his bedroom door and its surrounding frame to look like a blue police box as a present, and Sherlock shocked them all with gifts. John got an e-book reader, which was hidden in the folds of the ugliest set of red pyjamas Harry had ever clapped his eyes on, plus mucus green socks that

surpassed the mustard coloured ones he got from Uncle Vernon in terms of horribleness tied on top like a demented bow. John set aside the e-book reader and wore the pyjamas and socks all day. Harry got something Mrs. Hudson threw into the wheelie bin outside the moment it was unwrapped-a good thing, because Harry had no desire have a preserved toad that had teeth, claws and tentacles. After forcing Sherlock into a green jumper that had glassy-eyed cats knitted in the front, John demonstrated a hitherto unheard of ability to *cook* (even Sherlock was shocked). The food was very delicious though Sherlock complained about the decidedly non-traditional Christmas dinner fare ("Christmas won't die from a little non-traditional food! Christmas is strong!" John shouted). As odd as it was, it was among the happiest memories Harry had, and he was looking forward to another a year of it.

But it wasn't going to happen. Harry muttered imprecation against Mycroft as he read the email he got that morning.

Dear Harry,

I'm writing to inform you that John has just consented to join the Holmes family Christmas dinner. Sherlock has disclosed the marriage and I have confirmed the happy announcement. Family reaction was, understandably, that of profound skepticism if not outright disbelief. The news has also triggered an unprecedented number of people to invite him or herself over for Christmas. Uncle Endymion, who has feigned death each year to get out of the Christmas get-togethers, is yet to commence his annual demise and it does not look like he will. Even Cousin Sigerson, who vanished in Khartoum two years ago, has communicated his intention to visit us from Tibet.

Considering the level of excitement from John alone, I think it would be best if you waited until next year to meet the rest of the family. You are, however, more than welcomed to join us.

Mycroft

Harry had shown the email to Ron and Hermione over breakfast, and both of them told him not to go home for Christmas. Ron assured him it wasn't going to be bad at all, he and his brothers

were staying at Hogwarts too, because Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were going to Romania to visit Charlie. Harry supposed meeting a whole platoon of Sherlocks and Mycrofts was just asking for trouble, and he wasn't feeling very brave *and* very stupid at the moment, but that didn't mean he wasn't tempted to push his luck. Nevertheless, Harry went and signed his name on Professor McGonagall's list of students who were staying in school for the Christmas holidays and told John his decision.

"Mycroft 'suggested' this, didn't he?" said John.

Harry felt fear in behalf of Mycroft despite himself. "Err…"

"Say goodbye to Mycroft, Harry," John said. "Actually, don't. You need plausible deniability."

Later that day, Harry found out his decision to stay at Hogwarts at the last minute had somehow leaked and spread like an oil spill, because Draco Malfoy said rather loudly in potions class:

"I feel so sorry for all those people who have to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas because they're not wanted at home."

He was looking at Harry as he spoke. Crabbe and Goyle chuckled. Harry ignored them. Malfoy upped his unpleasantness since the last Quidditch match which ended in Slytherin's defeat. He first tried to make people laugh by suggesting a wide-mouthed tree frog would replace Harry as Seeker, only to discover no one found it funny. Since then he'd been taunting Harry for not having a proper family. His taunts usually didn't bother Harry so much since compared to the insults he experienced in London, Malfoy's were childish and laughable, but that particular jibe grated his nerves. So at the end of class, Harry took a quick detour to the adjacent courtyard for a breather.

"Harry!" Hermione called out from the side-entrance. "What are you doing? We need to go, there's not much time!"

"Okay!" said Harry.

He stashed his phone back into his pocket and quickly rejoined Ron

and Hermione in the castle. On their way to the Entrance Hall, they met a large fir tree. The large boots and puffing sound told them it was Hagrid behind the tree.

"Hi Hagrid," said Ron, looking around the tree. "Do you need any help?"

"Nah, I'm all right. Thanks, Ron."

"Would you mind moving out of the way?" Malfoy's cold drawl came from behind them. "Looking to earn some extra money, Weasley? Thinking of becoming a gamekeeper when you leave Hogwarts, I suppose. Hagrid's hut must look like a palace compared to where you live."

Harry grabbed hold of Ron before he could dive for Malfoy. Just in time too-Snape was heading towards the staff room and was looking at them suspiciously. Malfoy smirked before he, Crabbe and Goyle pushed roughly pass the tree and entered the Great Hall, scattering twigs and needles everywhere.

"I'm going to get him," Ron said, grinding his teeth at Malfoy's retreating back. "One of these days, I'll-"

"Oh, cheer up, it's almost Christmas," said Hagrid, "Tell yeh what, take a peek at the Great Hall, looks a treat."

It did indeed. Festoons of holly and mistletoe hung all around the walls and no less than twelve Christmas trees stood around the room. One sparkled with tiny icicles and silvery dust. Another glittered with the light of hundreds of candles and golden bubbles. For the new tree Hagrid brought in, Professor McGonagall conjured bells of gold and silver that made merry tinkling sounds.

"How many days you got left until yer holidays?" Hagrid asked.

"Just one," said Hermione. "That reminds me - Ron, Harry we really should be going. We only have thirty minutes before lunch, so we should be in the library."

"Oh yeah, you're right," said Ron, as he tore his eyes away from Professor Flitwick, who had a chain of crystals trailing out his wand

and was draping them over the branches of another tree.

"The library?" asked Hagrid as he followed them out of the hall, "Just before the Holidays? Bit keen, aren't yeh?"

"Oh we're not working," said Harry. "We're just trying to make a present for John."

"Present for yer Muggle Mum, eh? What are you makin'?"

"That's a secret," said Hermione. "Nothing illegal, but definitely *challenging* : far above first-year level."

Around the last week of November, Harry decided a potion that could cure at least *one* of John's persistent health problems would be the perfect Christmas gift for John. He got the idea while they were going around interviewing the Hogwarts professors (except Snape) in hopes to figure out who could be after the Philosopher's stone. Despite the fact they had a very convenient and plausible excuse for requesting these interviews-Hermione, full stop-most of the professors wanted to know why *Harry* wanted to be present. The first time this happened, Harry, in his desperation, cited his aspirations to become a doctor.

"A doctor?" said Professor McGonagall, their first interviewee (they figured starting with their Head of House would help them avoid suspicion) blankly. "You mean a Healer?"

"Uh, yes?" said Harry, hoping he sounded convincing. Then to his surprise, Professor McGonagall smiled.

"I usually give career advice to fifth years and up," she said. "But I supposed it's never too early to start. Now if you're interested in becoming a Healer, Mr. Potter, then you'll need at least an 'Exceeds Expectations' at N.E.W.T. level in Herbology, Transfiguration, Charms, Defence Against the Dark Arts and Potions."

Hermione took over the interview afterwards, asking what other subjects Professor McGonagall would recommend and what the teachers of those subjects were like. From that they got the names of the Study of Ancient Runes and Arithmancy teachers, Professor

Babbling and Professor Vector, and where they could find them. Harry himself was advised to speak to Madam Pomfrey for more specific advice regarding the medical field. Then McGonagall asked Harry what made him consider the medical field.

"Was Dr. Watson your inspiration?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"Um, yes," said Harry. "Not because John is a doctor, though that's part of it. I just… I met a lot former serviceman in the free clinic John works at. A lot of them suffered from war wounds, like missing limbs, chills and fevers, nightmares and flashbacks, damaged muscles and joints, horrible scarring…"

"How are they still *alive* ?" Ron asked, looking appalled, as Hermione and Professor McGonagall winced.

"I don't know," said Harry honestly. "But ever since Professor Dumbledore fixed John's shoulder, I couldn't help but think magic could really help them."

Harry was immediately warned using magic on Muggles was strictly regulated, but then Professor McGonagall hinted that, for cases of protection and healing, as long as the Muggles didn't *know* magic was being used, which was almost always, it was okay. Thus Harry left the interview considering the possibilities. Then, as they went around asking other professors for interviews, they quickly learned most of the teachers were very busy for the rest of the term and more than half were leaving Hogwarts for Christmas, so the interviews could only happen *after* the break. This left them in a limbo where the stone was concerned. So Harry shared his idea of making a potion for John. Hermione was intrigued and immediately asked what kind of potion Harry had in mind. That was where Harry's idea hit its first snag-he had no idea.

So they thought it through. Harry knew Dumbledore had already done something about John's more glaring injuries over the summer. Besides casting silent spells when John wasn't looking, the headmaster would leave 'a little something for the pain'.

"A little something for the pain, he says," Sherlock scoffed half-heartedly. "Remaking everything from inside out would be more

accurate. At this rate, I'll have to ask Mycroft to forge John's medical history."

There were, however, at least two things Dumbledore wouldn't touch: the shrapnel still inside John's body and the scarring. Sherlock confirmed both were still present when Harry asked. So Harry decided to make a potion that would get rid of either the scars or the shrapnel.

They first asked Madam Pomfrey for advice during Harry's weekly check-ups. The problem was, while Madam Pomfrey had experience treating scars, it was mostly fresh ones or scars that were only skin deep (like acne scars), not old massive scar tissue. As for shrapnel, she didn't even know what it was. It took Hermione long of enough to explain the concept, and in the end Madam Pomfrey said that sort of injury was beyond her skill to mend (vanishing spells couldn't do the job since shrapnel could be anything-nail fragments, metal scraps, stones and even *twigs*). The Weasley twins, who were scheduled to get punished for jinxing snowballs to bounce off the back of Professor Quirrell's turban, offered to serve detention in the Hospital wing, which they did, and when they returned, their pockets were bulging with all the potions Harry took for his own bomb related injuries. Apparently they wanted to help, and figured John and Harry's injuries were similar. Though Harry really appreciated the gesture, he knew the potions Fred and George nicked weren't going to cut it, since John's injuries were older and far more severe than Harry's (Harry wasn't missing *chunks of internal organs*, for starters). Harry even worked up his courage to ask Snape, and while Snape understood what he was talking about, he sneered at Harry's ability to do anything and refused to give him suggestions (" *Better prevent a disaster than court one, Potter.* "). That just left the library, but it was slow in going. Besides not knowing exactly what to look for, there was the sheer size of the library; tens of thousands of books; thousands of shelves, hundreds of narrow rows.

They went separate ways inside the library. Hermione pulled a list of subjects and titles she wanted to search. Ron went down a row and pulled books off shelves at random. Harry wandered over to the Restricted Section. He'd been wondering for a while if the book he wanted was somewhere in there. Unfortunately, one needed a

signed note from a teacher to read the books in the Restricted Section, and Harry knew he would never get one, especially now that Snape had an idea what he was up to. The books there contained powerful Dark Magic not taught in Hogwarts, and only older students studying advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts were allowed to read them.

"What are you looking for, boy?" asked the vulture-like librarian Madam Pince.

"Nothing," said Harry.

Madam Pince brandished a feather duster at him.

"You'd better get out then. Go on-out!"

Harry left wishing he'd been quicker at coming up with a story. He waited for Ron and Hermione out at the corridor to see if the two found anything. He wasn't hopeful. They've been searching for over a month, but only on odd moments between classes. What they needed was a nice long search without Madam Pince breathing down their necks. Or better yet, a magical Google that could examine the contents of all the books in the library for them.

Five minutes later Ron and Hermione showed up, shaking their heads. They went off to lunch.

"I think it's too late for this Christmas," said Hermione. "But there's always the next Christmas and John's birthday. You'll keep looking while I'm away, won't you?"

Harry nodded glumly. He rather hoped it would happen *this* year not many months and years later. Compared to the (still hypothetical) potion, sending John a box of Chocolate Frogs or Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans was just *lame.*

"Thanks for all your help, Hermione, Ron."

"Don't worry about it. This stuff is bound to be helpful later," Hermione said.

"Yeah, think about how well prepared we'd be if we ever get

pimples," said Ron, sniggering. "Or better yet, when *other* people start getting pimples-we could make a fortune selling diluted Bubotuber pus."

Harry snorted into his soup. Trust Ron to say such things!

Detective Inspector Lestrade drew two cups of punch and carried them over to his designated corner. He gave one to his wife Ellen, who was sitting down nursing her pregnant belly, and gave the other to John, who flanked Ellen's other side. John lifted the plastic tumbler in cheers before lowering it, not drinking.

"It's not spiked you know," said Lestrade.

"I know," said John. "I'll drink it later."

Lestrade shared a rueful smile with his wife as John fell back into silence. Reserved at the best of times, John was as silent as a sentry guard on duty that evening. Beyond their little corner, Lestrade's fellow Yarders were engaged in much silliness and relatively harmless Christmas-do shenanigans-Bradstreet and Gregson were engaged in a game of darts using only their bare feet, Jones and McDonald were abusing each other's choice of swill, Youghal was laughing himself into a coma as he watched Hopkins and Dimmock, both wearing fake reindeer antlers, lock heads against each other, and PC Brown was attempting to shove a hot-sauce tainted jam tart up PC Rance's nose.

John's phone pinged. John looked at the message and smiled for the first time this evening.

"Is it Harry?" asked Ellen. "What did he say?"

"He just sent a few photographs of the school Christmas decorations. The teachers are going all out."

"So he's really staying in school for Christmas?"

"Yeah," said John. "I supposed it's the better option. Harry doesn't like being stared at and there's going to be a lot of staring, or so

Sherlock warns me."

John looked frankly bewildered at this. Lestrade found himself in the unique position of being able to understand a Holmes of the Sherlock variety. If he were Sherlock's relative, he'd be staring too. The idea of Sherlock marrying anyone and *staying* married was enough to make a guy's head to go around the bend, so it went without saying the person who made it possible would be worth taking a good look at. That is, if you didn't get stuck on the Sherlock married part. *Lestrade* still had trouble believing the man was married, and he signed the marriage certificate that legally joined Sherlock Holmes and John Watson as the second witness. Sherlock's relatives had no chance.

Or maybe they'd be like Mrs. Hudson, who completely disregarded the implausibility of the marriage and thought the marriage registry office wedding was the saddest thing in the world. She was still trying to convince John and Sherlock to have a proper ceremony, offering to do all the planning and coordinating and send the bill to Mycroft Holmes. Lestrade was convinced the only reason Mrs. Hudson didn't just bulldoze John into the nearest bridal shop was because she couldn't do the same to Sherlock.

"What are you laughing about?" John asked as Lestrade grinned at the ensuing mental images.

"Nothing," said Lestrade. "You'll tell me all about the in-laws, yeah?"

"I'll definitely tell you if I end up shooting them all dead."

Lestrade laughed as Ellen exploded into assurances: "Ummm, not even. No, seriously, not even. They'll love you to *pieces*- "

Lestrade mentally took a step back to better watch Ellen in action. It was funny to see her and John get along. He hadn't seen it coming in the beginning. Indeed, the building of Ellen and John's friendship had been one rocky ride.

About two months into John and Sherlock's partnership and his own acquaintance to the former, Lestrade introduced John to Ellen. Once he realized John was, well, you know, and appeared not to have any

not-Sherlock friends, he figured John would appreciate some time off Sherlock. Mentioning Ellen's small group seemed like a perfect idea when he learned John was looking for a church to attend. He patted himself on the back when John actually went and kept on going. Then six weeks later, Ellen flooded his shoulder wailing: " *It's like talking to a brick wall!* "

From the inarticulate sobs that followed, Lestrade gathered John sat through the meetings displaying as much emotion as a granite statue, speaking only when spoken to and even then only giving short answers. Lestrade knew Ellen's small group enjoyed a depth of emotional openness and vulnerability that was rare in this day and age. Normally people would either leave in a week, uncomfortable at the level of intimacy, or get drawn into it. John neither got drawn in nor left. Ellen had no idea what John was thinking, and the way John and Sherlock interacted only served to confuse her further. It didn't help the answers John deigned to give were so tantalizing:

"We asked her why she was named 'John'," Ellen told him after John's second meeting. "John said she *wasn't*, her Dad named her *Hailey* . She changed it to John after she learned she had a twin brother. He was going to be named John, see, but when he was delivered stillborn, the family was so upset they didn't name him *or* claim his body. So the hospital put him in box labelled FETUS BOY WATSON. By the time John heard about it, his remains were already disposed of. Since she couldn't give him a funeral, she decided to be his living memorial. So anytime a person asks why her name is 'John', she tells them: 'I once had a twin brother. His name was John.'"

Clearly John Hailey Watson was a deeply feeling person, despite the phlegmatic exterior. Ellen thought it was a shame John bottled it all up, and tried to get John to express more. She was entirely unsuccessful, apparently, hence the crying fit in six weeks.

Interestingly enough, it was Sherlock who told him it was otherwise.

"Ellen got more out of John in six weeks than the therapist did in six months," Sherlock remarked.

"Are you talking about the twin brother story?" Lestrade asked. "I'm

pretty sure the therapist heard it too."

That remark made Sherlock explode into a scathing monologue:

"Use your brains for *thinking*, Lestrade, not merely for locomotion! John told Ellen she was named by her Father. Why only the father? Why *specifically* mention the father, when 'I was named Hailey' would do? You yourself noticed the distinct lack of female presence in John's life. The sister is distant and their relationship is perpetually strained. There is no mention of a mother, not even in passing. She was certainly not present to make decisions on what to do with her son's remains. What ties all these threads together? Only one: John's mother died in childbirth and her father never remarried . "

Lestrade gaped. Sherlock, of course, ignored this and kept on going.

"The complete absence of mother figures in John's life enforces the picture a widower in endless mourning. The strained relations between the sisters probably started when the elder blamed the younger for their mother's death. John's stiff formality towards women is likely the result of this kind of upbringing. That Ellen heard the *detailed* version of the old story, despite all these factors, is a testament to how John feels secure enough to *elabourate* . John's therapist never got this far and only presumed to understand. Don't you see? The clues are all *there* . You just need to connect the dots."

It must be said that the Lestrades may not be good at connecting dots, but they were *very stubborn* when it came to following leads. Ellen latched onto 'elabourate' and made John do that for everything. The short answers didn't improve all that much, but it did trigger something else to bloom like a garden full of flowers: John's writing. Somehow, Ellen's constant request for more details transformed the brief written accounts of John and Sherlock's cases into masterfully crafted short stories: sometimes whimsical, sometimes gothic, but always compelling. Now John's blog boasted a million-strong following and the numbers just kept on growing. If Lestrade were a boasting man, he might have claimed credit for the change. But he wasn't and since it was his wife's doing, he said so.

Of course, things got *really* interesting from the Yard's point of view when Ellen started to presume permission from John like Sherlock. Lestrade will never forget the day Ellen and her friends decided to stage an ambush when they came across John at a crime scene by chance. It was executed beautifully: They grabbed John, bodily hauled the doctor away and vanished into the crowd without uttering a single word. Sherlock stood there speechless for a whole minute, his entire body screaming: ' *what just happened* ?' John was returned three hours later, looking quite smashing in the new haircut, manicure, pedicure, v-neck, high-heels and miniskirt.

"Those girls make me do weird things," said John when Lestrade stared.

Sherlock's reaction to the incident was best left unsaid. Suffice to say Ellen never tried again, despite the standing ovation from his team. Ellen agreed to presume permission only if Sherlock wasn't on a case. John had no say on the matter. In fact, John probably didn't know the agreement existed. There wasn't a need to, really, because the reason why the agreement existed sorted itself out.

At some point John realized Ellen felt loved when her friends shared their feelings to her. John made an effort to articulate since then, as John believed one must show one's friends that they are loved as long as they lived (and wasn't that a loaded phrase, *as long as they lived*). Ellen, in turn, learned from these efforts what made John felt loved: being *included.* Not in the heart of things, not shoved away to the peripheries, just surrounded by people who knew John was there and liked it very much. Once he realized that, Lestrade kept inviting John to functions like these. Sherlock was happy since he didn't have to worry about Ellen's ambushes. The Yarders were happy since they liked having John around without Sherlock. But more importantly, John and Ellen were happy, and Lestrade could *really* pat himself on the back for putting a smile on their faces.

Speaking of John and Ellen, they seemed to have moved on.

"How about coming to our place next year?" Ellen was saying. "The kids would love to meet you, Sherlock and Harry."

"Sounds better than visiting in-laws," John said. "How old are your

kids again?"

"Julia is ten, Martin is three, and Rupert is one."

"And little Elise is on her way," said John a bit wistfully. "Julia excited about her baby sister?"

"She won't stop talking about it. I think she's more excited than I am, and I've been praying for a girl since Martin was two…"

Lestrade smiled into his tumbler. He really did love it when his wife was happy.

Harry had meant to look up more healing potions over the holidays. But once the holidays started, he and Ron were having too much fun to think about books or potions. They had the dormitory to themselves and the common room was practically empty, so they could get the good armchairs by the fire. They spent the hours eating anything that could be speared on a roasting fork, playing wizard chess and reading Sherlock's intermittent texts that updated Harry the goings on of the Holmes family:

The potions you and AD sent for Christmas put John to sleep. John currently sleeping like a corpse. SH

Aunt Esmeralda convinced John is a corpse and is accusing Cousin Quigley of killing John. SH

John just woke up. Aunt Esmeralda already carried out threat and broke cousin Quigley's nose. SH

Mummy thrashed Cousin Aubrey with Mycroft's umbrella for calling John an ugly wretch. SH

Cousin Aubrey drunk at the time so may have been referring to Cousin Tobermory's wife, not John. SH

Turkey dry. Green beans limp. Sprouts raw. Said so. Cook threatened violence and needed to be restrained. SH

Cousin Jeremiah got thrown out of a window; had the temerity to say no one noticed John is secretly male. SH

Bits of body parts missing from John returned. John displeased; said magical healing only fun the first time. SH

Sherlock last missive on Christmas Eve said Grandmother Holmes told everyone they blew it- John must think they were a family of barbarous jackanapes, because John left the house to attend Christmas Eve service at a nearby chapel. Mycroft's assurances that church attendance was a frequent habit, not a desperate ploy to avoid in-laws, and the reason John gave for chapel going- celebrating the birth of Christ- was likely the honest truth fell on deaf ears.

When he woke early next morning, Harry found a pile of packages at the foot of his bed.

"Merry Christmas," said Ron sleepily as Harry scrambled out of his bed.

"You too," said Harry. "Look, presents!"

Harry picked up the top parcel. It was wrapped in thick brown paper that had 'To Harry, from Hagrid' scrawled over. Inside there was a roughly cut wooden flute- Hagrid obviously whittled himself. The second parcel was a large box of chocolate frogs from Hermione.

"I think I know who send that one," said Ron, turning pink as he pointed at the lumpy parcel Harry just selected. "My Mum. I told her you couldn't go home for Christmas and-oh *no*," he groaned, "She's made you a Weasley jumper."

Harry held up the thick, hand-knitted Emerald green jumper inside the parcel.

"She makes one for us every year," said Ron as he unwrapped his, "and mine's *always* maroon."

"That's really nice of her," said Harry as he took out the box of homemade fudge that came with the jumper. He tried one. It was very tasty. "Oh, I think that one from John."

Ron eagerly tore open the brightly wrapped parcel Harry pointed out. Inside there was an assortment of Muggle sweets and biscuits, three small cans of fizzy drinks and, for some odd reason, a collection of Muggle coins.

" *Weird!* This is *money* ? And what is this-Jammie Dodgers and HobNob's! Are they any good?"

"They're pretty good," said Harry, laughing at how fascinated Ron was. "I wonder what John got me-oh!"

The biggest parcel Harry planned on opening last turned out to be from John, Sherlock and Mrs. Hudson. He read the card first: *Merry Christmas. Sorry we can't celebrate together this year. Forgive? J&S and Mrs. H.* It had an odd assortment of things like Ron's: a stash of Happy Faces and Mars Bars, gel pens of different colours, homemade toffee, a jar of cloudberry jam, sticky notes, a thick flannel blanket, a pocket magnifier identical to the one Sherlock carried and a couple of novels written by one Brian Bumblebee.

"' *A real page turner; spent all night reading it. J'* They must be *really* good if John gave up sleep," Harry said as he read the note attached to the books. John approached sleep the way some people approached war: fight until death or victory.

There was only one parcel left. Harry lifted it up. It was very light. Harry wondered if it was from Mycroft. He couldn't think of anyone else who'd send him a gift.

But before he could open it, the dormitory door flung open and Fred and George Weasley bounded in. They were wearing blue jumpers- one had a large yellow F and the other a G. Harry put the parcel inside a drawer of his bedside cabinet. He'd open it later.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Hey, look- Harry's got a Weasley jumper too!"

Fred held up Harry's jumper. "Harry's better than ours, though. Obviously Mum puts more effort when you're not family."

"Why aren't you wearing yours, Ron?" George demanded. "Come

on, they're lovely and warm."

"I hate maroon," Ron moaned even as he pulled it over his head.

"Yours doesn't have a letter," George observed. "I supposed Mum thinks you don't forget your name. But we're not stupid. We know we're called Gred and Forge."

"What's this racket?"

Percy Wealsey stuck his head in, looking disapproving. He, too, had jumper hanging on his arm. Fred seized it.

"P for Prefect! Come on, Percy, wear yours too, even Harry got one!"

The twins, in their typical whirlwind manner, bullied Percy into wearing his new jumper, actually forcing it over his head when Percy didn't comply. Then they went downstairs for the feast, frog-marching Percy, whose arms were pinned to his sides by the Jumper.

"You're not sitting with the prefects today," said George. "Christmas is a time for family."

The Christmas dinner was a sight to behold. Harry overloaded his phone with photos of the hundreds of fat, roasted Turkeys, (literally) flaming Christmas puddings, Dumbledore wearing a flowered bonnet instead of his pointed wizard's hat, a wine-sloshed Hagrid kissing Professor McGonagall on the cheek (who giggled and blushed), Percy extracting the silver sickle embedded in his slice of pudding that almost broke his teeth, and the wizard crackers. Harry really liked the wizard crackers-the one he pulled with Fred didn't just bang, it blasted off like a cannon and engulfed them all in blue smoke, while a rear admiral's hat and several live mice exploded inside.

After the feast, Harry and the Weasleys enjoyed a furious snowball fight on the grounds until, wet, cold and gasping for breath, they returned to the common room. There, Harry snuggled into his new blanket by the fire and watched Percy chase Fred and George all

over the Gryffindor tower because they'd stolen his prefect badge. Ron's accusation that he was acting like a withered old man only made Harry act more like one. After a meal of turkey sandwiches, Trifle and Christmas cake, even Ron was too full and sleepy to do much but sit down and vegetate until they went to bed.

Harry spent the next day playing exploding snap with Ron in the morning, and lounging around reading the novels John gave him in the afternoon. He read them twice because he liked them so much. Both featured little Adriana, who became terrified of magic after being horribly bullied by Muggle children. The first book followed her and her older brother Albert's journey to overcome her fear. Harry felt like cheering at the end, when Adriana soared to skies on a broomstick for the first time. The second book was about Adriana and Albert exploring magic together. As he read the descriptions of the places the siblings travelled to, Harry was filled with a powerful sense of wonder. Could this magic be real? Would he, Harry, at the end of his Hogwarts education, learn to fly without a broom, swim the depths of the sea, and open magical portals that could take him to completely made-up worlds? Albert's constant refrain resonated in him: *Open your eyes and don't be afraid…*

Percy found Harry lying on his stomach close to the fire, pondering the possibilities.

"What are you reading?"

Harry lifted up the first book of *the Tales of Adriana.* To Harry's surprise, Percy frowned at the book.

"Where did you get that? That's a restricted book, Harry."

"John gave it to me for Christmas," said Harry. "And what do you mean, restricted?"

"That book was put in the Restricted Section for its overly negative depiction of Muggles," said Percy pompously. "Your adoptive mother likely didn't know that since she's a Muggle. You better give it to me."

"But the story isn't *about* Muggles," Harry protested, clutching the

books protectively to his chest. "I mean, yeah, there's that part with Muggle bullies, but it was short!"

"But it's still there, isn't it?" said Percy impatiently. "Plenty of magic children grow up never once meeting a real Muggle, so they get all their ideas from stories. My own father thinks the book is too risky for children to read."

"But I don't have that problem!" said Harry as he danced away from Percy's grasping hands. "I live with Muggles! I know some of the best of Muggles around!"

Harry ended up hiding in the dormitory because Percy wouldn't leave him alone. As he fumed at Percy for ruining the wonderful feeling he got from his perfectly fine gift, Harry remembered the parcel he put aside on Christmas morning. He hadn't been in a big rush to open it since he thought it came from Mycroft. No doubt it had some kind of surveillance equipment hidden somewhere. Still, it would be rather rude to not even check. So Harry took out the parcel and removed the wrapping.

Something silvery grey and fluid slithered down to the floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Harry picked up the shining, silvery cloth. It was odd to touch, like moonlight and water woven into material. Thoroughly puzzled now, Harry tried to find a note. He found a tiny one attached to a corner. He didn't recognise the narrow loopy script that the penned these words:

Your father left this in my possession before he died.

It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.

A very merry Christmas to you.

There was no signature. Harry felt strange. Who sent him this? Did it really belong to his father? What was it?

Harry sat down on his bed and spread the cloth over his lap. He gasped when his legs disappeared from view. He quickly threw the cloth over his shoulders and dashed in front of the mirror. Sure enough, all he could see was his head floating in mid-air. When he

threw the cloth over his head, his entire reflection vanished from sight.

As he stood there amazed, a half-forgotten passage from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* bubbled up in Harry's mind.

"An invisibility cloak," he whispered.

Harry remembered reading about Demiguises, how they could turn themselves invisible and that their hair could be woven into invisibility cloaks. So this is what it feels like, Harry thought, as he carefully removed the cloak and ran a hand over it. He thought it would be heavier and coarser, seeing as it was made of animal hair. *His* cloak felt as smooth as silk and light as air.

The dormitory door opened. "Harry?" said Ron's voice.

Harry quickly stashed the cloak away. He didn't feel like sharing just yet.

"There you are! What are you doing, hiding up here?"

"Avoiding Percy," said Harry. "We had a row."

"Percy was a being prat again?" said Ron. "I'm going to bed. Are you going to stay up?"

Harry shook his head. They changed into their pyjamas. Ron fell asleep as soon as he drew the curtains of his four-poster. Harry listened to the sound of his breathing for a few minutes. Then he silently reached under his bed and pulled out the cloak again.

His father's… this belonged to his father. Sherlock found very little on parents, particularly his father- just two names on his birth certificate, and his mother's maiden name listed in an old student directory of a primary school up at Northern England. Now he had something else to show his father once lived, something tangible. *Use it well,* said the note. What could he use it for? Harry thought as he slipped out of bed and wrapped the cloak around him. He stood in front of the mirror again, and only saw moonlight and shadows. It was an odd feeling.

Then suddenly, Harry felt wide-awake. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him with this cloak. Excitement flooded Harry's veins as he stood in the darkness and silence. He could go anywhere in this, and Filch would never know. After casting one last look at the mirror, Harry crept downstairs, walked across the common room, and climbed out of the portrait hole.

"Who's there?" the Fat Lady squawked. Harry said nothing. He quietly went down the corridor.

Where should he go? Harry's heart hammered in his chest as he thought. He could go the Restricted Section in the library. He'd be able to read as long as he liked, as long as it took to find a solution to the shrapnel problem. Making up his mind, Harry made his way to the library.

It was pitch-black and very eerie inside. Harry lit the end of his wand with a quiet *lumos* to see his way through the rows of books. He walked to back where the Restricted Section was located, and paused for a moment before the rope that separated those books from the rest of the library.

It wouldn't hurt, Harry decided. If the Restricted Section had perfectly fine books like *The Tales of Adriana*, then it can't be that bad. Surely the books wouldn't come off the shelves and bite him now, would they? Granted, a book at Flourish and Blott's had beaten up John, but that was because it was a *bookstore* .

Harry stepped over the rope. He shined the light of his wand over the titles. They didn't tell him much. Some had peeling titles spelled in a language he didn't know. One had horrible black stains Harry suspected was blood. The hairs on the back of Harry's neck prickled. Perhaps he was imagining things, but Harry thought he heard whispers coming from the books. Like they knew there was someone who shouldn't be there.

Harry slowly walked down an aisle. He decided tonight would be just reconnaissance. Just plunging in rarely ended well, and besides, he now had many nights available. Harry searched for titles he could read and sounded relevant. He turned the corner, and immediately noticed the pair of bulging, lamp like eyes staring up at his wand.

Harry quickly put out the light, just as he made out the scrawny, dust-coloured body of Filch's cat, Mrs. Norris. He heard rather than saw her whisk back into the shadows. His heart in throat, Harry tried very hard to *walk* not *run* from the library. *Don't run if you need to get away quietly*, he remembered Sherlock telling him . He passed Filch at the doorway. Filch's bulging pale eyes looked right through him.

Harry went down a narrow corridor and stopped in front of a tall suit of armour. Where was he? He knew there was a tall suit of armour in front of the kitchens, but that was the basement. Where should he go?

"Sniff around, my sweet, they might be lurking in a corner…"

Harry felt the blood drain from his face as he heard the soft, greasy voice of Filch come from ahead. How did Filch get ahead of him? Did he take a shortcut? Harry looked around wildly. He saw a door ajar to his left, further down the corridor. Harry squeezed himself inside. Then, standing next to the hinges and holding his breath, Harry listened. He heard the sound of footsteps come near, then far, until it dyed away.

Harry exhaled. That was close. Too close. Feeling his panic slowly drain away, Harry took a look at the room he entered.

It looked like an abandoned classroom. There were dusty chairs scattered in the corner, and the desks were pushed to the side. But there was something leaning against the wall that looked quite out of place.

It was a magnificent mirror, as tall as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame and clawed feet. On top was a carved inscription: *Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.* Harry had been around Sherlock for too long to not notice a cipher when he saw one. The key was simple-all he had to do was read backwards and ignore the breaks.

"I show not your face but your heart's desire," Harry whispered.

Harry stared at the mirror. An odd presentiment filled him. He inched slowly towards it. Then, as if taking a plunge, he stepped in front of

the mirror.

He had to clap his hand over his mouth to stop himself from screaming. He whirled around. There was no one there, and he was still wrapped in the cloak. But when he stepped in front of the mirror, he not only saw himself, but several others as well.

Harry slowly turned back to the mirror. There was his reflection, looking white and terrified, and there, right behind him, at least eight others, two looking very familiar. Harry turned around again and reached out. If there were invisible people in the room and the mirror showed you whether you were invisible or not, then he should be able to touch them. But his hand just grasped at air.

Harry looked at the mirror again. The faces he noticed immediately were John and Sherlock's. They looked different. Not *wrong*, like they did on September 1st, but *whole* . John looked healthy and free of the haunting spectre of war that seemed to always lurk just behind the eyes. Sherlock looked relaxed - content even - and he was holding a tiny, squirming bundle no bigger than a loaf of bread. As he watched, a tuff of black curly hair poked on top of the bundle.

Harry slowly turned his eyes to the couple standing next John and Sherlock: a very pretty woman and a tall, thin man who wore glasses. The woman had dark red hair and her eyes- *her eyes look like mine*, Harry thought as he inched closer to the mirror. Her eyes were bright green, the exact same shape, and they ran with tears, even as she smiled. The man standing next put his arm around her. His hair was black and very untidy, and stuck up in the back, just like Harry.

Harry felt his voice clog inside his throat. He felt his eyes welled up as he stared hungrily at the image before him-the wonderful, *impossible* image.

"Mum?" he whispered, "Dad?"

The four just smiled at him. Slowly, Harry looked at the other faces in the mirror. There was a man who looked so much like John he had be a twin. Next to him was an elderly woman who had Harriet Watson's features. He saw a pair of green eyes like his, noses like

his and an old man who had his knobbly knees.

Harry pressed his hands against glass, his nose almost touching. Could this be a portal to another world? Was the image a reflection a made-up world, like the ones he read in *The Tales of Adriana* ? Whatever it was, Harry wished he could just fall right through and join the people on the other side of the glass. He felt a powerful ache inside-a war of joy, terrible sadness and desperate longing.

Harry didn't know how long he stayed there. At some point he sat down, the invisibility cloak pooling around him, as he stared at the reflection in a kind of reckless abandonment. He heard a noise somewhere, but he ignored it. Who cared if he was caught? What were they going to do anyway? Take off points? Put him in detention? He'd gladly pay the cost-just for one more minute in front of this mirror. Nothing was going to stop him. Nothing.

Except-

"Hello, Harry."

Harry started and looked behind him. Sitting on a desk by the wall was none other than Albus Dumbledore.

"Sir?" Harry stammered. "I-when did you-I didn't see you, sir."

"Strange how nearsighted being invisible can make you," said Dumbledore.

Harry was relieved to see that Dumbledore was smiling. Quietly, the headmaster slipped off the desk and sat on the floor next to Harry.

"So," said Dumbledore. "You, like hundreds before you, have discovered the delights of the Mirror of Erised."

"Is that what this mirror is called?" asked Harry.

Dumbledore nodded. "I also believe you know what it does. You decrypted the inscription after all."

"How did you-?"

"I don't need a cloak to become invisible," said Dumbledore gently. "Now, can you think what the Mirror of Erised shows us all?"

Harry turned his eyes to the inscription. As he did so, the ache inside him receded, leaving behind a hollow feeling.

"… *Your heart's desire*," Harry said slowly. "I saw my parents… and John and Sherlock healed, because…"

"Because that was your heart's desire," said Dumbledore quietly. "This mirror shows you nothing less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. You, who have never known the family that bore you, and now have parents haunted by old wounds and painful memories, see them all whole and restored to you. I dare say if your friend Ron Weasley, who has always been overshadowed by his brothers, looked into this mirror, he would see himself standing alone, best of all of them. However, this mirror gives us neither truth nor knowledge. Men have wasted away before it, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible.

"This mirror will be moved to a new home, Harry, and I must ask you to not go looking for it. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that. Now, why don't you put on your admirable cloak and go to bed?"

Harry nodded. He gathered the cloak around him. Just before he left, Dumbledore asked one last question:

"If you can indulge an old man's curiosity, Harry, can you tell me what a healed Sherlock looked like in the mirror?"

Harry thought about it. He couldn't quite find the words to describe it, so he took a quick look at the mirror. Tiny arms and hands were sticking out the bundle Sherlock was holding, and they were clutching at his face.

"Discord," Harry blurted out.

Dumbledore's bushy eyebrows formed an obtuse angle. " *Discord?* "

"Discord Holmes, sir," Harry explained, "My imaginary sibling. It all

started when Sherlock kept scraping at his violin until one in the morning and John told him Discord is going to be very cranky if he kept playing Fugue for Strangulated Cats. Now I get a new imaginary sibling every time Sherlock is especially difficult. There's Discord, Omission, Petulance and Congelatio. The mirror showed me Discord as a real baby and Sherlock holding her."

The corners of Dumbledore's eyes crinkled. Harry grinned shakily.

"Indeed," said Dumbledore, beaming. "Thank you for answering my question. Now good night."

Harry went back to bed smiling. He didn't expect his first night out in his invisibility cloak to end this way, especially after the mirror, but he supposed remembering the night he was shocked awake at the sound of John yelling: " *OHFOR- Sherlock, your FEET! Do you want Congelatio to DIE?* !" was one of the better ways.

Final Notes : I was inspired by Westron Wynde's description of the extended family of Sherlock Holmes (canon version) when I made up Sherlock's (BBC version). The background story of John's name is based on the true story of Roger Holloway and his effort to give his stillborn baby sister, whom he named Rachel, a proper burial. You can read the whole story in the Houston Chronicle.

Congelatio is medical term for *frostbite* . Sherlock's feet must have been *frigid* .

I read the corresponding chapter in PS while writing the chapter, and couldn't help but marvel how beautifully JKR set it up. There is of course the whole Nicolas Flamel angle, and the invisibility cloak. But underneath is this running idea: "Christmas is time for family." I don't think it was coincidence George said those very words the middle of the chapter, and Harry spent a whole day of 'family time' just before he looked into the Mirror of Erised. This set up, I think, made Harry see his parents, not him successfully returning to the tower of finding the book that had Flamel.

Full Cups of Distress

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Ten: Full Cups of Distress

After the interesting trip to Edinburgh to meet Sherlock's family for Christmas, John hoped for a few days of quiet. But as soon as they returned to London, John felt an onslaught of chills and fevers. The next day John woke up with a full blown strep throat-or flu, or pneumonia, John couldn't tell which. The last place John had been ill was at Camp Bastion, where she contracted HA-MRSA post-surgery. Though the sickness levels of the two events couldn't be compared, at least at Camp Bastion John had people who took care of patients. At 221B this was dubious-not when Mrs. Hudson was away.

John was weighing the pros and cons of getting out of bed when Sherlock's silhouette appeared at the door.

Normal husbands, John supposed, would perhaps try to be helpful (and two to one fail miserably). Where Sherlock was concerned, John fell back to normal operating procedure: observe subject's behaviour and reserve judgment.

"Strep throat," Sherlock said at the threshold, confirming John's initial suspicions.

John half-expected Sherlock to return to whatever that was

occupying his mind after he made his diagnosis. But he didn't. It was rather eerie, receiving his full attention as an interesting corpse would.

"You really don't expect anything, do you?" said Sherlock. "Not resignation, just a statement of fact. Interesting."

Sherlock noiselessly padded into the room and knelt next to the bed. John refrained from warning him about infections. Sherlock never liked it when someone told him what he already knew. Probably.

"Of course I know," Sherlock groused. "The bacteria are probably incubating *already* ."

John was going to snort, but went into a coughing and sneezing fit instead. Sherlock smothered it with the ugly red pyjama top lying at the foot of the bed. Then he rested his chin on John's forehead, the lips almost touching.

"Thirty-nine degrees Celsius give or take two points," he said.

"And you can tell that just by touch," John rasped.

"Obviously," said Sherlock, as arrogant as usual.

John swallowed the instinctive quip. Thinking was too difficult. It felt like coarse ropes were tightening its hold around her throat. A dull ache pounded just behind the eyes. John started nodding off without meaning to.

A thick straw poked at John's lips. John sipped whatever liquid was offered. It was warm and tasted of honey, cinnamon, ginger and milk.

"Wrong," Sherlock muttered without his usual rancour.

"I didn't say anything," John whispered.

"You were thinking about the cinnamon and ginger and decided it was Masala Chai. You're wrong. It's curried pumpkin soup, watered and filtered to a fluid consistency."

John briefly wondered how Sherlock got the curried pumpkin soup, but then decided not to bother. It was tasty and soothing. That was good enough. Meanwhile, Sherlock shifted his position. His mobile beeped quietly. Buttons were pressed. John watched through one bleary eye Sherlock in his fourth most frequent pose- that of poring over his phone.

"Harry thanks you for the gift, particularly the novels," Sherlock intoned, pitching his voice *just so* that when used on certain clients, made them go weak on the knees or just plain sleepy. "He's off to interview the suspects. He will record everything for my perusal later." A pause, "It might take them the better part of two weeks, considering his class schedules and that of the teachers. The excuse of wanting to become a Healer is working extremely well."

"Might come back to haunt him later," John said in between coughs.

"Perhaps," Sherlock said. "He's certainly showing all the instincts of a good a *detective* ."

John smiled at the pride in Sherlock's voice.

"You should train him."

"What do you think I'm doing?"

"You tell me," said John. "So have you figured it out, yet?"

"I know who and what to expect," said Sherlock. "The question is how to nudge Harry to the right direction."

"Don't nudge him too fast," John mumbled. "Harry might start skirting around the culprit and draw attention."

Sherlock waved his hand dismissively. "It would never go that far. Harry may not have a credible poker face yet, but he knows to keep his cards to himself."

"Mmmm," John murmured, not convinced. Harry was no Sherlock, for which John was grateful, yet for anyone to be good at their field, a certain amount of absorption and tunnel vision was expected, but tunnel vision was a dangerous blind spot for detectives to have.

John hoped Harry's partners in investigation would have enough sense to start watching Harry's back if he showed any signs of rushing headlong into an investigation, tossing important things like caution and safety to the wind like Sherlock still did despite the innumerable times he almost got himself killed or worse as he did so.

"He's too cautious," Sherlock complained. "There's no reason for him to dither. Why isn't he going straight to likelier suspects?"

Yes, John decided, it was very a good thing Harry was no Sherlock.

"Are you sure you want to do this, Harry?" Ron asked. "We could wait until Hermione gets back."

Harry nodded as he rubbed his tired eyes. Ever since Dumbledore warned him the dangers of the Mirror of Erised, Harry kept his invisibility cloak folded and hidden on the bottom of his trunk. Harry wished he could delete the memories of what he saw in the mirror as easily, but he couldn't. He started having nightmares. Over and over again if he wasn't seeing his parents vanish in a flash of green light, he was reliving the day he and John almost died. He needed a distraction, something that would take his mind completely off of the mirror, and besides Quidditch, he couldn't think of a better way to distract himself than continuing their investigation of the thief - namely interviewing the teachers.

"We need to do them anyway, and Professor Flitwick said he was available," Harry said. "We'll put Hermione on the line so she doesn't miss anything."

Hermione was a bit upset when Harry told her what they were going to do, but agreed it was probably the best use of time.

"I wish I was *there*," she complained. "It's just not the same."

"It's just Flitwick," Ron assured her. "Anyway, you can talk to him later."

They met Professor Flitwick at his office. He offered Ron and Harry

sparkling cider and Peppermint Toads as he settled into his chair which was stacked with several large cushions so he could see over his desk.

"So, how can I help you?" asked Professor Flitwick.

Harry was prepared this time. "I'm interested in becoming a healer, professor, and I heard for that I needed to be very good at Charms. I just wanted to know more about the specifics."

"Ah, yes, Professor McGonagall told me about this," said Professor Flitwick, beaming at Harry. "Healing is a very old and noble profession Mr. Potter, and Charms feature a large part of it. But I should first mention the duties of a wizard healer and a Muggle one is very different."

Harry listened in rapt attention as Professor Flitwick described the different ailments wizards and witches suffered via badly cast charms-sprouting wings, vomiting slugs, oozing slime, heads clanging like bells, and growing horns.

"So it's not just cuts, tick bites, and pneumonia," Harry remarked.

"Indeed, no," squeaked Professor Flitwick. "Wizards and witches are more resistant against diseases and accidental injuries than Muggles, but we are not exempt from them. We also have our own diseases and maladies."

"Like dragon-pox and scrofungulus," said Ron.

"I guess jinxes and curses take large part of it too," said Harry.

Harry then asked about wizard surgery. Both Flitwick and Ron were appalled at the very idea, Ron actually calling surgeons nutters who cut people up. Harry felt offended in behalf of John, but refrained from saying so during the interview. As for things like diabetes, cardiac defects, cancer, hepatitis and genetic disorders, Professor Flitwick didn't know much-in fact, he confessed to never have heard the terms DNA and chromosomes. But that was fine. Harry didn't care if wizards in general or Flitwick in particular were up-to-date on Muggle medical research. It was all ground work to lead up to the

questions he *needed* to ask.

"A bit off-topic, but how long have you been teaching Charms, professor?" Harry asked.

"Over forty years now," squeaked Professor Flitwick.

"So you must know the other professors really well."

"One could say so," said Professor Flitwick, "I've seen colleagues come and go, and the students I've taught become teachers themselves."

"What do think about Professor Quirrell? I mean, Professor McGonagall told me Defence Against the Dark Arts is another requirement and I understand that, but he seems so… *new* ."

Give people the opportunity to gossip, Sherlock had instructed. *Nothing reveals a person's character more than when you ask what he or she think of the weakest and the most gossip-worthy.* Harry, Ron and Hermione agreed no one was a bigger gossip fodder without the fear of retaliation than Quirrell, hence the question. They also decided to ask the question in the middle of the interview to reduce the probability of the teachers remembering them asking it. At any rate, they figured it was worth the try.

"I would be patient," squeaked Professor Flitwick. "Professor Quirrell was brilliant, articulate and diligent as a student, and remained so when he was first appointed as our Muggle Studies professor. He took a year off to gain first-hand experience to prepare for the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, but I'm afraid he was… not quite prepared for the experience itself."

"Yes sir," said Harry.

Hermione quickly moved on to the inevitable questions about the Charms O.W.L.s (Ordinary Wizard Levels) and N.E.W.T.s (Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests). Harry made a mental note to think about final projects for his N.E.W.T. classes before he asked how the Study of Ancient Runes or Arithmancy was related to healing.

"There is no direct relation," Professor Flitwick answered. "But I do

recommend them as these courses will serve to demonstrate your academic curiosity, your ability to handle advance instruction and think in abstract terms. These are quite necessary to set yourself apart from the regular medic to the truly talented Healer."

"What about extra-curricular activities?" Harry asked (this was one of the questions John compiled for him 'to make it sound like he really thought this medical thing through').

"Oh, those help too," Professor Flitwick said, sounding a bit mischievous. "May I suggest the Charms Club?"

"You don't happen to be the tutor, do you?" Harry grinned.

"As a matter of fact, I am!" Professor Flitwick said, laughing. "If I may say so, it's an excellent place to test and experiment charms that tickle your fancy, but didn't manage to find its place in the classroom."

Harry considered this. "So if I wanted to, say, make a three dimensional map of Hogwarts…"

"The Charms Club would be the place to go!" said Professor Flitwick. "Creating a floor plan of Hogwarts is actually a pet project of the Charms Club, though the unfortunately the trend is by the time a student knows enough about the castle to make a useable map, a map is no longer needed."

"That's not true," said Harry. "You can always lend it to a firstie. They'd probably appreciate it a lot."

"They would indeed," said Professor Flitwick, beaming. "Do you have any other questions?"

Harry and Ron shook their heads. They thanked Professor Flitwick for his time (and the Peppermint Toads, which Ron had finish devouring over the course of the interview) and took their leave, but not before Harry promised to look into the Charms Club.

"That was certainly informative!" said Hermione over the phone. "We're definitely going to check out Charms Club later, it sounds very interesting!"

"We're interviewing suspects, Hermione," Ron reminded her.

"That doesn't mean we can't think of other things!" Hermione protested, before moving on rather quickly, "So who are we going to interview next?"

"Professor Kettleburn or Professor Trelawney, I think," said Harry.

"I doubt it's Kettleburn," said Ron, "Charlie told me about him, and he doesn't sound like the 'planner and opportunist' Sherlock was talking about."

"Why? What is he like?"

"Well, there's this story he provided a worm for a school production of *A Fountain of Fair Fortune*, only it was an engorged Ashwinder, and it exploded half-way through the play and set the Great Hall on fire…"

"So Potter interviewed you, too, Silvanus?"

That was the first question tossed into the staffroom during the first afternoon tea break since the term started. Professor Kettleburn puffed out his chest.

"Of course he did!" boomed Kettleburn. "No healer can go without a thorough knowledge of Magical Beasts! Potter definitely has the right idea!"

Severus sneered in his corner where he was grinding coffee beans while his colleagues cooed over Potter's latest antics. They sounded like besotted idiots, the whole lot of them.

"I think I should rethink my retirement, now that I know Potter is definitely interested in taking Care of Magical Creatures!" Kettleburn went on.

"But you've been preparing for retirement for the last *decade* !" Flitwick exclaimed.

Kettleburn stomped his two peg legs. "I'll just get a couple of assistants and go part-time. I'm not missing this!"

"You're going to need them," Severus muttered. "I can only think one student more troublesome than Potter and its Longbottom."

"Pah! You say that to everyone but a handful of your Slytherins, Snape!"

"On your head, then."

Severus knew what kind of explicit gesture Kettleburn wanted to form with the three articulated digits of his clamp (but which were charmed not to) when he said: "On *yours* !"

"Did Potter ask you about Quirinus?" asked Professor McGonagall. Severus twitched at the mention of Quirrell. "He seemed a bit worried about him when he talked to me."

"Nope," said Kettleburn.

"He did to me," squeaked Flitwick. "I told him to be patient."

"Quirinus is going to have a nervous breakdown before the end of second term, at the rate he's going," said Sprout, shaking her head. "His trembling is getting worse with each passing month."

Severus paused over his new cafetiere as his colleagues worried over Quirrell. He could bet his life it was no coincidence Potter was inquiring Quirrell of all people when he was going about 'interviewing' the teachers. He could also bet all the money in Gringotts that the person(s) who gave the aforementioned cafetiere as a Christmas gift to him-a novel occurrence that left Severus reeling for five full seconds-was the reason behind the questions.

Severus pulled out his second Christmas gift-a mobile phone that had the words 'Blessed by St. John Watson' engraved on the back-from his inner robe pocket as he carefully spooned coffee grinds into his cafetiere. Muggles definitely had the right idea when they invented mobile phones and text messages. He just couldn't understand why they didn't arrange the buttons in alphabetical order when they manufactured them.

Using your child to flush out the culprit? Dear me, Watson, dear me.

He got his reply within a minute.

Not my idea. Sherlock's idea of training Harry. Am too sick to stop him.

Severus raised an eyebrow.

Cold?

Strep throat. Took amoxicillin. Will be back to normal in a week.

Severus sneered at the Muggle's idea of fast turnover.

Will send pepper-up potion via owl post. effects instant, but makes taker smoking in the ears for hours afterwards.

Thanks :) Harry as village witch doctor now actually sounds like a really good idea.

btw Sherlock says perish the thought of directly interfering with next Q game. Says acting suspiciously now is useless.

I have no idea what he means, so don't ask me.

Severus stowed the phone back inside his robes after reading the last message. He felt distinctly troubled. How did Sherlock Holmes know he was planning to referee the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff Quidditch match? He shared the idea to no one, not even Dumbledore. Severus pondered the facts as he poured hot water over the coffee grinds. The only sources of information Sherlock Holmes had were Potter and Watson. Potter would have nothing good or useful to say about him - his actions in Potions class and the Gryffindor-Slytherin match made sure of that. Watson knew for a fact he was a sworn enemy of James Potter, therefore had no love for his son Harry Potter. How then did Holmes figure out Severus would think to referee the next match? It made no sense.

I need to confront the man, Severus decided as he waited for the coffee to finish brewing. He'd seen neither head nor hair of Sherlock Holmes these past four months, which was odd considering he was

visiting 221B every week and Holmes lived there, too. It was possible his absence had some relation to the current conundrum. The question was *how* .

"I must say, I definitely like the smell of coffee," said Flitwick, sniffing appreciatively.

"May I try a sip, Severus?" asked Madam Pomfrey.

"Just a moment, it's still brewing," said Severus. He pressed the plunger down ever so slowly. "There."

He filled Madam Pomfrey's teacup. She hesitated over the rich brown liquid.

"I think I'll try it with cream and sugar first," she said.

"If you must," Severus huffed.

"So when is Harry going to interview you, Poppy?" asked McGonagall.

"Harry hasn't asked me for an interview, but then he doesn't need to, does he?" said Madam Pomfrey. "I'm sure he'll ask another slew of questions this coming Sunday."

"Ah, so he's already been picking your brains," said McGonagall, smiling.

"A new question every week!" Pomfrey confirmed, "I'm going to miss them soon," she added.

"So the healing regimen is finally over? That's wonderful!" said Flitwick, actually clapping.

"Just two more weeks, and he'll be done," Pomfrey said. Then she sighed. "I wish he was treated earlier. The ruptured eardrums I could mend, and the potion Severus brewed for the traumatized GI tract worked wonders, but scar tissue from internal bleeding and toxic smoke inhalation…" she shook her head. "I'm afraid he'll never be perfectly well."

Severus left the staffroom soon after that. He told himself he wasn't fleeing because he wasn't.

He really, really wasn't.

"Harry, I really think you should go to the hospital wing," said Hermione.

Ron, Hermione and Harry were in a small landing in North Tower. Harry sat leaning against a wall, knees to his chest. There was an scary rattling sound in his breathing, and he was clutching his forehead. Despite all this, Harry shook his head.

"Just give me a minute," he wheezed.

Ron and Hermione looked at each other helplessly. Harry hadn't been in the best of health since start of term. He kept having migraines and nosebleeds randomly. Just yesterday he had a massive nosebleed in the middle of Defence Against the Dark Arts, and had to go to the hospital wing because it wouldn't stop. Though Madam Pomfrey gave him a note, Harry still showed up for Potions and endured a two torturous hours of Snape. To top it off, he insisted on joining the interview with Professor Sybil Trelawney.

"It's not that I don't trust you two," said Harry. "But I need to be there to ask the healer-prep questions."

The trek to North Tower, where the divination classroom was located, had taken them well over thirty minutes. They only managed to find it at all through the dubious help of one Sir Cardogan. As they wandered around an unfamiliar corridor that had one lonely painting featuring a stretch of grass and a fat dapple-grey pony grazing, a short, squat knight in a suit of armour with grass stains on his knees clanked in.

"Aha!" he yelled upon seeing Harry, Ron and Hermione. "What villains are these that trespass upon my private lands? Come to scorn at my fall perchance? Draw, you knaves, you dogs!"

They watched in astonishment as the knight drew his sword and

swung it around violently. The sword was too big for him, however, and before long he overbalanced and fell face-first to the grass. After a beat, he seized his sword and used it push himself upright, but that made the sword sink deeply into the grass. Though he tried to pull the sword out with all his might, it just wouldn't budge. At length he flopped back down on the grass, and lifted his visor to mop his sweaty face.

"Um, you don't happen to know how to get to the North Tower, do you?" Harry had asked.

The knight's demeanour instantly changed.

"A quest!" he shouted, clanking to his feet. "Follow me, good friends, and we shall find our goal or perish trying!" He gave his sword a fruitless tug, failed to mount his pony (again), gave up, and cried, "On foot then, good sirs and gentle lady! On! On!"

He ran off. They hurried after him, following the sound of his armour. Here and there they spotted him running ahead in a picture. After spotting him in a picture of women in crinolines hanging on the wall of a narrow spiral staircase, they climbed the tightly spiralling steps, huffing and puffing, until they saw the knight pop his head into a painting of some sinister looking monks.

"Farewell!" he cried. "Farewell, my comrade-in-arms! If you ever have need of a noble heart and steely sinew, call upon Sir Cardogan!"

"Yeah, we'll call you if ever need someone mental," Ron muttered as soon as Sir Cardogan disappeared.

They found a tiny landing at the end. There were no doors, but there was a circular trapdoor with a brass plaque on the ceiling. But before they could approach the trapdoor, Harry semi-collapsed to a sit, wheezing. Hermione took one look at his chalk-white face and insisted he go to the hospital wing. Harry refused. Ron and Hermione knew there was no use trying to change his mind when he used that tone so they just waited, wishing Harry would *stop* being so bloody stubborn.

"… I'm okay now," said Harry at length. He was still too pale, but at least his breathing sounded normal.

They took a step towards the trapdoor. It suddenly opened and a silvery ladder descended to their feet.

"After you," said Hermione, nudging Ron. So Ron climbed the ladder first and emerged into the strangest classroom he'd ever seen. There were twenty or so circular tables stuffed inside, all surrounded by chintz armchairs and fat little poufs. A dim, crimson light lit the whole place. It was stiflingly warm, and the fire burning under the crammed mantelpiece gave out a sickly sort of perfume as it heated a large copper kettle. All the curtains of the windows were closed, and the many lamps had dark red scarves draped over them. Shelves ran across the walls, and they were full of crystal balls, many packs of playing cards, dusty feathers, stubs of candles, and a huge array of tea cups.

"Do you see her?" Harry asked when he appeared at Ron's shoulder, right after Hermione.

Just then a soft, misty voice came from the shadows.

"Welcome," it said. "It's good to see you in the physical world at last."

Professor Trelawney entered into the firelight. Ron immediately noticed she was painfully thin, and her glasses magnified her eyes several times its natural size. She was wearing long emerald earrings, and a gauzy spangled shawl his Mum wouldn't be caught dead wearing. Numerous chains and beads hung on her spindly neck, and the arm and hand that gestured them to sit was encrusted with bangles and rings.

"Welcome children," said Professor Trelawney, who seated herself on a winged armchair next the fire. "I am Professor Trelawney, the teacher of the most difficult of magic arts, Divination. You may not have seen me before. I find that descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye."

Ron, Harry and Hermione had nothing to say to this extraordinary

pronouncement. Professor Trelawney delicately rearranged her shawl and continued:

"Though I applaud your early interest, I must warn you from the outset if you do not have the Sight, there is very little I'll be able to teach you. Books can only take you so far in this field…"

Hermione started at the news that books wouldn't help. Ron and Harry shared a grin.

"Many witches and wizards, talented though they are in the area of loud bangs, smells and sudden vanishings, are yet to penetrate the veiled mysteries of the future. It is a Gift granted to few. You, boy," Professor Trelawney suddenly directed her enormous, glittering eyes at Harry. "Is your mother well?"

Harry darted his eyes left and right before saying. "Er, I think so."

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you, dear," said Professor Trelawney before going on placidly, "Here you will learn the many branches of Divination such as reading tea leaves, palmistry and Crystal balls. Unfortunately, by the time you take my class, an unexpected danger will arise, and many who could've taken this class will not be able to."

A tense silence followed those words. Professor Trelawney appeared to be unaware of this, and glided over to a shelf that had a large silver teapot.

"Before you go, I must give you a glimpse of your future through tea leaves," she said.

She took a pink patterned teacup from a shelf and sat back down in her armchair. She filled the cup with tea, drained in slowly, and swilled the dregs around the cup three times with her left hand. Afterwards she turned the cup upside down on its saucer, and waited until the last of the tea drained away before turning the cup upright again.

"What do you see?" she said quietly, holding up the cup to their direction.

They peered inside.

"A bowler hat?" said Ron, tilting his head sideways.

"Maybe an acorn," said Harry, very dubiously.

"Just soggy brown tea leaves," Hermione said flatly.

Professor Trelawney surveyed Hermione reprovingly, before staring into the teacup herself.

"The falcon… my dears, you have a deadly enemy."

"Like who?" Hermione demanded. They all started at her. "Everyone has enemies, but if you don't know who it is, there's no point in knowing."

Professor Trelawney chose not to reply. She lowered her huge eyes to the cup again the continued to turn it.

"The club… an attack. My, my, this is not a happy cup. Also the skull… danger in your paths, my dears…"

Professor Trelawney gave the cup a final turn. Suddenly she gasped, and screamed. She sunk back into the armchair, eyes closed. A glittering hand shakily put the cup on a table, and then clutched at her heart.

"Oh this is terrible… no it's kinder not to say… no… don't ask me…"

"What, what is it?" said Harry, leaning closer.

Professor Trelawney's huge eyes opened dramatically.

"My dear," she whispered. "There was the Grim."

Ron felt his stomach lurch in horror. Harry and Hermione, on the other hand, looked clueless.

"What's a Grim?" Harry asked.

"The Grim, my dear, the Grim!" cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked Harry didn't understand. "The giant, spectral dog

that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen-the worst of omens-the omen of *Death!* "

Silence reigned for third time. Harry stared at Professor Trelawney, wide-eyed. As terrified as he was, Ron couldn't help but notice Harry didn't seem to be all that afraid.

"Thank you for time we bothered you long enough!" said Harry in rush. He stood up from his pouf and headed for the exit. Ron and Hermione quickly followed. They barely heard Professor Trelawney's trembling voice biding them farewell as the trapdoor shut behind them. Harry didn't stop until he reached the bottom of the spiral staircase. Once he got there, he pulled out his phone.

"What are you doing?" Ron asked.

"Testing," said Harry simply.

He pressed one on the speed dial. After a couple of rings, John's voice said: "Hello."

"Hi John," said Harry. "Are you okay?"

"Of course I am. Why shouldn't I be?" asked John, sounding puzzled.

Harry let out a sigh of relief.

"Nothing. Me, Ron and Hermione just interviewed the divinations teacher and she said… well, she predicted that you may not be alright."

"Divinations? What, like fortune-telling?"

"She was reading tea leaves."

"Are you serious?" said John incredulously. "They actually *teach* you that kind of stuff?"

"It's an elective," Hermione said.

"I can't believe this," John muttered. "Okay, listen you three: *Don't*

touch this stuff . I'm not magical, I know, but trust me. Trying to predict the future with fortune-telling will do you no good."

"But Trelawney saw a Grim in the teacup!" Ron protested. "If she really saw a Grim, that's bad… My-my Uncle Bilius saw one and-and he died twenty-four hours later!"

"Coincidence," said Hermione airily.

Ron felt infuriated at her dismissive attitude. "You don't know what you're talking about! Grims scare the living daylights out of most wizards!"

"There you are, then," said Hermione in a superior tone. "A wizard sees a Grim and dies of fright. The Grim isn't an omen, then, it's a cause of death! As long as you're not stupid enough to actually believe you're going to kick the bucket, you're fine!"

Ron opened and closed his mouth wordlessly. Then he looked at Harry in mute appeal. Harry shrugged.

"What I want to know is if Professor Trelawney really has the Inner Eye or whatever, then why didn't she know the *real* reason why we're interviewing her? I mean, wouldn't she be offended that we think she's a thief?"

There was a moment of blank silence. Then the four of them laughed uproariously.

"You're right!" cried Ron. "I totally forgot about that!"

"So she's a fraud!" said Hermione triumphantly. "I knew it!"

"She's likely honestly deluded," John said. "Anyway, if the stuff actually works, and your teacher can really see the future, then she wouldn't be teaching young, impressionable students how to read tea leaves. She'll put her money where her mouth is, and play the market. Or work as a government-sponsored seer. No politician worth their salt is going to let a real Seer loose."

"So that's that," said Harry after they said goodbye to John. "I think we can cross off Professor Trelawney. She's no planner and

opportunist. *Drama queen*, yeah, but not a planner."

They laughed again.

"At least it wasn't complete waste," said Hermione. "Now I know better than to sign up for Divination."

"Yeah, sounds like a waste of time in a teacup," said Ron. "No wonder Flitwick and McGonagall were going on about Study of Ancient Runes and Arithmancy. Kettleburn's a nutter and Trelawney's a fraud. Doesn't leave much else, now, does it?"

"There's always Muggle Studies," said Harry. "Too bad me and Hermione are Muggle-raised…"

"Wouldn't it be fascinating to study Muggles from a wizard's point of view?" said Hermione earnestly.

"Maybe. Let me know if you do," said Ron. "I'm beat. Want to go visit Blippy?"

Harry and Hermione looked like they were going to agree, but their expressions froze mid-way. Ron felt a chill run down his spine as he slowly turned around. Sure enough, Snape was looking down his hooked-nose at the three of them. His eyes were narrow and full of suspicion. After holding them fossilized for several beats, Snape strode off without a word.

"He's following us everywhere!" Harry hissed as Hermione shakily let out the breath she was holding. "Doesn't he have a life of his own?"

"What life?" muttered Ron angrily, "Why can't he be the thief, eh? It would've made our lives so much simpler!"

Terry Boot paused for a moment when he saw three of his Hufflepuff classmates approach the hospital wing. Justin Finch-Fletchley, Ernie Macmillan, and Hannah Abbott all turned to his direction and looked surprised.

"Hello, Terry, what are you doing here?" asked Justin.

"Visiting Harry," Terry replied. "I heard he was taken to the hospital wing again."

"How do you know him?" asked Ernie. A fair question, as Gryffindors and Ravenclaws had very limited chances of interaction, having no shared classes, and Terry wasn't Muggle-born.

"Well, I met him at Sunday chapel back in September," said Terry. "I told him my Dad's a Muggle, and Harry offered to lend me his phone if I ever wanted to call home. We've been friends since then."

Justin and Ernie nodded in understanding.

"Sounds like something he'd do," said Ernie solemnly. "I got to know him through Justin. Harry and Justin met at Diagon Alley and then we started playing cricket together."

"We meet every Tuesday so I can call my mother," said Justin. "We do Herbology homework together afterwards."

"I wonder how his guardians are coping with the phone bill. It must be huge," said Terry, lips twitching.

"I asked about it, actually," said Justin. "He said: 'it's okay. Mycroft is paying.'"

"Who's Mycroft?"

"He didn't say," said Hannah. "But he had this funny look on his face when he said the name. We think he's Harry's eccentric Uncle or something like that."

They entered the hospital wing. The first thing they saw was Madam Pomfrey raging at a burly upper-classman boy wearing scarlet and gold Quidditch robes.

"-and no more than three times a week! Do you hear me, Wood?! No more than THREE!" she bellowed.

Wood bowed his head, his expression both mulish and remorseful.

A few paces behind him, the Weasley twins, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger were hovering around a bed.

"How is Harry?" Justin asked.

"Still out cold," said Ron grimly. Terry looked over and saw Harry lying on the bed. He was still wearing his scarlet Quidditch robes and appeared to be sleeping. Except there were flecks of dried blood around his nostrils and mouth, and he was as pale as parchment.

"What happened?" Hannah asked tremulously.

"He had a nosebleed today," said one of the twins, "During practice, out of nowhere. Oliver told him to just fly it off, but Harry was having migraines too. It was so bad he actually blacked out."

That moment Harry woke up. "wahwuhappened?"

"You blacked out, mate," said the twin from earlier. "Madam Pomfrey says Oliver's been over-training you."

"No he wasn't," Harry protested.

"He was, actually," said the other twin. "No more than an hour of Quidditch practice a day for you; matron's orders."

Harry looked he wanted to argue, but then he just sighed. "Still on the team at least," he muttered.

"Yep," the other twin grinned. "Sorry, Harry, you're not off the hook."

Harry sunk into the pillows and rubbed his right eye. For a moment, Terry thought Harry had two black eyes, but then he realized those were actually dark circles. Then Harry noticed him staring.

"Oh, Terry, sorry, I missed our meeting didn't I?"

"You didn't, actually," said Terry wryly. "And I wouldn't have minded if you did. You look like a holiday would do you good."

Harry smiled sheepishly.

The first years all gathered around Harry's bed. Justin, Ernie and Hannah brought fruit, biscuits and bottles of pumpkin juice, and offered it to everyone. They were just getting started on what promised to be a good get-together of friends when Madam Pomfrey finished raking Oliver Wood over the coals and stormed over.

"This boy need rest, he just had a severe EIA attack! Out! OUT!"

They all fled from the hospital wing, leaving poor Harry to recover alone. They would've each gone their separate ways, but then Hermione stopped short.

"Oh no," she said as she frantically patted her robe pockets. "Harry's phone! I can't find it!"

"I thought you picked it up from the stands!" said Ron.

"I thought so too," wailed Hermione, now digging into her robe sleeves. "I must have dropped it!"

Justin, Ernie and Hannah offered to help. Terry tagged along.

They hurried over to the Quidditch pitch. On their way, they met three Slytherin first years, a blond boy with a pointy chin and two gigantic and thuggish looking boys. The blond boy sneered at them.

"Off to take care of Master Potter's things, Weasley?"

Justin and Ernie grabbed hold of Ron before he could dive at him. The blond boy swaggered away, malicious glee painted all over his face. Terry felt a horrible foreboding fill his stomach when he saw that expression.

"Let me at him," Ron growled as he tried to break free. "I had enough, I don't care, I'm going to kill Malfoy if it's the last thing I do…!"

The boys dragged Ron to the Quidditch Pitch, the girls leading the way. As soon as they reached the stands, Hannah let out a loud gasp. Hermione had both hands over her mouth and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Oh, *no*," Hermione whispered. "That evil, that *foul*… how *dare* he-"

Terry looked reluctantly down and saw the burnt, smoking remains of Harry's phone.

Final Notes : Sorry, dear readers. I couldn't get this chapter out earlier due to a combination of work and school. It's like having two fulltime jobs right now.

Cafetiere: known as French Press to Americans and coffer plungers in other places.

EIA: Exercise Induced Asthma

Pride and Impertinence

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. Readers beware!

Chapter Eleven: Pride and Impertinence

The evening Potter was taken to St. Mungo's after a severe Asthma attack, and three Hufflepuffs and Potter's two lackeys reported *someone* had destroyed Potter's phone-Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle the latter two insisted-Severus found himself needing to go visit Watson. Much to his consternation, McGonagall insisted on joining.

"I don't see why this is necessary," said Severus stiffly.

McGonagall glared at him. "A student of my House has suffered such a severe Asthma attack that he had to be taken to St. Mungo's. Not only that, *someone* destroyed a cherished possession of his. It's my *duty* to inform his parents."

"I'm merely offering to do the informing since I have an appointment with the parents in question," Severus said.

"I appreciate the offer, but *NO*," said McGonagall. "This is my responsibility. If anything, one can argue *you* need not go as I have greater reason to be there."

Thus finding himself without a ground to stand on, Severus could only fume to himself. He was still quietly grumbling when they appeared in front of the door leading to Sherlock Holmes and Dr.

Watson's upstairs flat.

It had become a comfortable ritual of his, Apparating in front of this door every week. Severus would knock, wait for a second, and then enter. Watson would be at the other end of the sitting room, seated behind the table reading a book or typing away at the laptop. Watson would look up, smile a bit and let out a soft: "Hello, Snape." Despite the pain and suffering that followed, it wasn't everyday Severus was allowed to be himself and not get told off for it, as it was in 221B, so he'd come to look forward to these weekly sessions. McGonagall's presence was like grit in a sensitive instrument, an impurity that marred a delicate balance, and Severus resented that. That McGonagall was present because she was suspicious of his motives (for good reasons) only made it worse.

Severus knocked and opened the door per routine.

The first thing Severus noticed was Watson's absence. The second thing he noticed was the stranger sitting on the leather armchair. It was a man around his age, tall, thin and angular, wearing an impeccable charcoal Muggle suit sans tie and a pearly dress shirt that looked obscenely tight. His mop of curly black hair was positively girlish in length, and his slanted blue-grey eyes were disconcerting in its colourlessness and penetrating quality. Rather than asking who Severus was or why the two of them were here, the man raked his eyes up and down at the two of them.

"Mr. Holmes," greeted McGonagall.

"Professor McGonagall," said Sherlock Holmes in a condescending way only those born of privilege could manage. "And Professor Severus Snape, I presume."

Severus nodded once as he folded his arms, fully prepared to hate the man for all eternity and beyond.

McGonagall squared her shoulders.

"Mr. Holmes, I'm afraid Mr. Potter-"

" *Watson*," Holmes interrupted. "His name is Harry *Watson* . Why he

has to curtail himself to fit your world's insipid expectations I can't even imagine, but at least here call him by his actual name."

It took Severus a good deal of effort to not let his jaw drop. Did this man just…?

"… My apologies," said McGonagall stiffly. "Mr. Holmes, your son Mr. *Watson* was taken to St. Mungo's Hospital to get his asthma treated."

"Exercise induced?"

"Yes. How did you-"

" *Please*," Holmes sneered. "Harry engages in high velocity sports in open air in the middle of January in *Scotland* . What else could it be?"

For a while McGonagall just stared at Holmes, her mouth the thinnest of thin lines. Severus just concentrated on keeping his jaw in place as he stood galvanized at Holmes' sheer disregard.

"… Mr. Holmes," McGonagall bit out, "Your son. Was taken. To the *hospital* ."

Holmes raised an eyebrow, "And?"

"Aren't you worried?!" McGonagall demanded.

"What for?" said Holmes. "Is worrying going to help him any? The treatment has already been administered and success is expected, otherwise you wouldn't be this calm. The main purpose of your visit can't be just to relay this information otherwise Professor Snape wouldn't have accompanied you. Professor Snape has his own purpose for this visit, he wouldn't be present if not, and he could've easily relayed the news for you if that was all. Implication: you can't trust your colleague to do something. You have to do it yourself. So why are you here?"

McGonagall fell into a moment of silent, opened-mouthed outrage. Severus gave into temptation and just let his jaw drop. Of all the things he imagined of Sherlock Holmes, he didn't even hit close to

reality.

Before McGonagall could explode, Watson clattered up the stairs and entered the room.

"Hey, Sherlock, what-oh, hello," said Watson, looking Snape, McGonagall, and finally Holmes. "Okay, what's going on?"

Having found a normal person to converse to, McGonagall relayed the latest news regarding Potter. Watson reacted with appropriate level of concern.

"Is he going to be okay?" Watson asked.

"Of course he's going to fine, why else are they here hours after the fact?" Holmes retorted.

Watson gave Holmes a look was that part fond, part exasperated. "It's one of those empathy things, Sherlock."

Holmes paused, and appeared to seriously consider this as if hadn't occurred to him before. "So, not good?" he asked.

"Really not good, yeah," Watson answered.

Holmes was quiet for exactly one second before moving on to Severus. "So what is the your purpose of this visit? You must have a personal stake at hand, since you clearly resent Professor McGonagall's presence."

This time Watson gave the ruinous look spouses gave to husbands when they were being spectacularly stupid/insensitive/embarrassing.

"Let him talk, Sherlock," said Watson, using a tone that booked no protest.

Holmes just rolled his eyes. "Ah, *dull* ."

After the barrage of impertinence of the likes never seen before, Severus found himself applying courtesy to rebalance the universe.

"Three students of my house developed pink blotches on their faces

and skin. They are clueless as to how they got it from and refuse to speculate where and when it started. I have tried to remove the pink taint to no avail."

Holmes abruptly sat upright.

"Ah! So that's why you're here!" he said, looking at McGonagall to something akin to approval. "They must have touched Harry's phone without his knowledge. The phone was rigged to spray a chemical reagent of my own invention on any unauthorized persons. The reagent reacts to skin and can't be removed through normal means."

Severus feared as much. "The phone was destroyed."

"The idiots must have actually tried to break into it then. The miniature explosives planted in the phone would have splattered the chemical reagent on everything within a ten foot radius."

That explained the splatter pattern on Draco's face. Severus had initially wondered if a paint bomb exploded on him at close-range.

"You put *explosives* inside your son's phone?" asked McGonagall incredulously.

" *He* didn't put it," said Watson, jerking a thumb at Holmes's direction. "It came that way. Hazards of government issued phones."

"… Oh," said McGonagall, taken aback and unsure how to respond to this. "Well, rest assured, the students will be punished appropriately and ordered to replace the phone."

"Good luck on that," Watson muttered. "It was custom made. I don't even know how expensive it is."

"Thirty-five thousand quid," said Holmes promptly.

"Yeah, so that's, what, seven thousand Galleons?" said Watson. "Their parents are going to *kill* them."

Lucius Malfoy certainly wasn't going to take it without fight, thought Severus. Evidence notwithstanding, there was no way Lucius was going to replace a Muggle devise no matter how expensive without

'legitimate' proof, which of course, would exclude anything Muggle.

Holmes smirked at Severus. "Oh, I should mention, unless I alert the appropriate channels, the British Government will trace the phone back to its last location. You don't want that to happen, now, do you?"

Severus did a bit of nonverbal *Legilimens* on Holmes to confirm his veiled threat. Immediately he was bowled over by *thoughts* of the most massive and exacting kind: A middle-aged man wearing a three piece suit and a supercilious smile handing over the phone Potter carried everywhere to Watson, warning about the explosives, the biometrics verification and monitoring; a brief image of Severus's snake cufflinks, indication he was the head of Slytherin, the House of cunning and ambition; the bags under Severus' eyes indicating late night patrolling, stains on his teeth pointing to his coffee drinking habits, fresh stains on his fingers showing he'd handled powdered moonstones and hellebore (draught of peace?); Potter talking about Draco and his bullying attempts; Draco at Madam Malkin's, bragging about his pure-blood status; all of this coagulating together: Snape was trying to give leverage to his House but currently failing in this instance due to McGonagall's presence, Draco a favoured student, the Malfoys a prominent family unwise to be at odds with, and most likely riddled with a sense of superiority because of their long history of magic ability, and Harry's dismissal of Draco culminated in this last act of vandalism, which Draco will not get out of as Holmes was *really speaking the truth regarding the phone* - if Draco's father had any sense of self-preservation, he would fork over the funds, as wizards are surprisingly foolish and easy to find once one knows what to look for (incongruous clothing, utter ignorance of technology), and with the entire population probably less than an average military regiment, one word to Mycroft and the entire Magical population would find itself compromised for sure…

Severus suppressed his instinctive gasp when he pulled away from Holmes's mind. The sheer magnitude of thoughts that passed through the man's head in the brief seconds was truly staggering-in fact it was physically painful, as if he'd overindulged. Holmes regarded his reaction keenly.

"Interesting," Holmes said, zeroing on Severus. "Oh, that's *clever* ."

Severus carefully wiped his face clean of expression, though he was probably too late. He wondered briefly if Holmes realized he had extracted his thoughts, but refrained from using Legilimency again because now he knew Dumbledore was absolutely right. Holmes *was* a genius in a class of his own. Messing around with *that* mind would be the height of foolishness, especially when people in power *knew about it.* For now he'll just have to assume Holmes at least suspected the existence of mind-reading spells and leave it at that.

"I shall keep that mind when I inform the parents," said Severus formally.

Holmes disregarded that. "You're *wasted* as a teacher."

Severus raised an eyebrow. It was flattering, certainly, to be acknowledged by a genius, but he was two minds on how to respond.

"… Thank you," Severus said. "Now, Mr. Holmes, do you have a chemical formulae that can remove the stains?"

"Of course," said Holmes.

"You can have it once the kids are hung up to dry," said Watson, flashing a close-mouthed grin.

Snape tipped his metaphorical hat at them. He would've done the same thing.

"Very well. Now about Mr. Watson's phone…"

Harry hadn't felt this miserable in years. He had miserable days before - he had nine miserable *years* living with the Dursleys - but it had been a while since he had a good reason to feel too miserable, so he was caught off guard and out of practice.

First Hermione told him someone destroyed his phone. Malfoy proved to be the culprit when he was caught literally pink-handed thanks to the chemical explosives rigged to detonate if anyone tried to break it. But this and the fact Malfoy got detention and lost fifty

points from Slytherin didn't change the fact he didn't have a phone anymore and all the stored data was lost. The last made Harry feel like crying.

Then Madam Pomfrey told him he had to take an indefinite break from Quidditch because of his EIA. Though the Healers in St. Mungo's transfigured Harry's airways back to pre-Asthma conditions, it didn't mean he stopped having the tendency to develop EIA. The only way to prevent it from happening again, Madam Pomfrey told him, was stop putting himself in situations where his airways would swell. This meant no more Quidditch until his freshly transfigured airways got used to the rest of his body and the weather warmed up a bit. Wood was so devastated by the news he started walking around like someone broke his soul in half.

"At least you can still play," Wood said disconsolately after he stopped howling at the injustice of it all. "But only for an hour max. We're playing against Hufflepuff, so maybe we won't need more than an hour to win, but that's assuming you're in good condition by the time we play…"

Wood deteriorated into incoherent mutters. His other team-mates were sympathetic, but without Quidditch practice to unite them, plus their rapidly diminishing chances of winning the Quidditch Cup, talking to them became extremely awkward. Harry felt guilty every time he saw the glum looks on their faces and whenever a passing Slytherin said: "Thanks, Potter, we owe you!"

The third awful news came right at the heels of the first two. Professor McGonagall told Harry he wasn't allowed to have a smart phone anymore because the phone's camera and ability to send picture messages compromised the Statute of Secrecy too much. Harry tried to argue digital photos were no worse than wizard photos-in fact wizard photos were *worse* - and that he never sent overtly magical photos, but Professor McGonagall stood firm.

"You can still write letters," she said. "Tad slower, perhaps, but it does accomplish the job."

But Harry didn't want to wait for days to receive correspondence or not hearing John's voice for *months* .

"What about non-smart phones?" Harry asked desperately. "Older phones don't have cameras or videos. I could use that, can't I?"

Professor McGonagall pursed her lips.

"I suppose that's permissible," she said at length. "But you must show me and Professor Burbage your new phone before you are allowed to use it."

Harry sent a quick note to John via Hedwig, who was very eager to deliver the letter, pleading for a phone that could only call and text. The wait was horrible. He felt restless and vulnerable without a phone in his pocket, and his inability to talk to John during his free time felt like a constant stomach ache. And he suddenly had too much of it, *free time* that is. No wonder Sherlock reacted violently whenever he was bored.

"I'm not used to this," Harry muttered as he waited for Ron to finish copying his star chart.

"Oh, come on, you're not going to *die* because you don't have a phone for a few days," Hermione scolded. "And weren't you complaining about never finding the time to go to the Charms Club?"

That was true, Harry conceded, but his current misery sapped his desire to do anything. He might've stopped trying to do his homework too if he didn't have Hermione to bully him into working. He supposed he could while away his time playing chess or Exploding Snap or Gobstones or other wizard pastimes, but the lack phone revealed something that left Harry rather hurt and reluctant to spend time with other people.

Harry had been aware some of the older students with Muggle parents were only nice to him because he was famous and had a miraculously working phone. But far more people than he'd expected stopped talking to him once they realized he might not get a replacement phone and couldn't play Quidditch as he used to. It was a terrible feeling, not knowing for sure if someone genuinely liked you or just pretending to be for their own purposes. At least he was sure of Ron and Hermione, who stood by him regardless, and the memory of Ernie, Justin, Hannah, and Terry coming to visit him

at the Hospital Wing still warmed his heart.

"True," said Harry, feeling better now that he remembered who his *real* friends were. "Let's go to the Charms Club tomorrow. We've been talking about that map long enough."

Hermione jumped to her feet. She hadn't looked so excited since they'd got back the marks for their very first piece of homework.

"Stay here!" she said, as she sprinted up the stairs to the girls' dormitories. Harry and Ron barely had time to exchange mystified looks before she was dashing back, several enormous books in her arms.

"I found these from the library weeks ago!" she whispered excitedly. "There's a lot books on making architectural blueprints, topography and map-making if you know where to find them!"

Harry stared at the tall stack of books Hermione dropped onto their table. Clearly she'd been *itching* to start this project for a long time. Then Harry remembered something. He snerked and pulled out a book from his bag.

"Harry!" Ron wailed. "Don't tell me you've started reading textbooks in bed too! That's *indecent* !"

"I found this over Christmas," said Harry, laughing at Ron's horror. "The title was so funny I had to check it out."

He lifted up the book so Hermione and Ron could read the garish title: *Star Wars, A guide to blending Science and Magic for Witches and Wizards* .

Hermione burst into giggles.

"Huh?" said Ron blankly, looking from Hermione to Harry.

"Oh my goodness! Where did you find it, Harry?" Hermione said between giggles.

"The Muggle Studies section," said Harry. "There's a bunch of books just like it. There's one on *Star Trek, the Matrix* and *Hitchhiker's*

Guide to the Galaxy . Half of the stuff is rubbish, but it does tell you how to create magical holograms."

Hermione was fascinated. Ron, of course, still looked lost at sea.

"What's a hologram?" he asked.

"Let me show you, I worked out the charm last week," Harry drew his wand and muttered the incantation. Ron and Hermione let out a gasp when a ghostly 3D image of their faces sprung out of his wand tip.

"That's amazing!" exclaimed Hermione. Then she snatched the book away from Harry and started to read furiously.

"I thought we could use this charm for the map," Harry said, grinning, as Ron made funny faces to his holographic self. "We just have to figure out how to put the charm on a parchment or something."

"Sure beats drawing it by hand," said Ron, grinning back. "Wait till I show this to Fred and George… !"

The next month was the happiest Hermione had been. It was as if all her wishes had come true.

John and Sherlock wrote back within a week. The note said it was going to take a month until they could get the replacement phone ready for a magical environment. Apparently there was a direct correlation between how long John possessed a phone and the phone's ability to cope with stray magic in the air, a month being the minimum for a place like Hogwarts. Harry was very disappointed.

"I bet you a million Sherlock tested every angle," he confided to Hermione. "How long you have to keep it, which model works with magic faster, if you have to keep it always or just using it normally is fine, and if engraving makes any difference."

"I'm surprised he could enter Diagon Alley. I mean, that's where he must've tested everything, right?" said Hermione.

Harry's wry smile didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Oh, he would've found a way… if he didn't get himself banned afterwards."

Thus left without Quidditch consume to his evenings or his phone to distract him, Harry directed their collective attention to the Charms Club and making a map of Hogwarts.

The Charms Club was wonderful. Members were allowed to experiment as much as they wanted as long as an upperclassman monitor or Professor Flitwick was there to supervise. Professor Flitwick taught them how to embed charms on objects so they could project holograms off of them. They first practiced the Holography Charm on different things, like their wristwatches, parchment, a hand mirror, the sharp end of their quills, and the tip Professor Flitwick's pointed hat, on one memorable occasion. Then they started making holograms of various objects. Solid immobile objects were the easiest, which made map-making very simple. All they had to do was enchant their practice maps- small squares of parchment, folded twice, for now-when the halls were empty.

"This is just like Star Wars!" Harry said excitedly as a 50:1 scale holographic image of the third floor corridor materialized in mid-air when he unfolded his map.

"You'll tell me what Star Wars is before I die, right?" said Ron as he admired the image too.

"It's a Muggle film," said Harry. "Come over this summer and we can all watch it together."

From there they moved onto enchanting the parchment squares so it could switch between the different stored images, change the POV, and make labels appear on the images. This required them to learn how to make different charms work together, a delicate operation Harry picked up very quickly.

"Wouldn't it be great if homework was this fun?" Ron said gleefully as he made the words 'FOOD!' flash on top of the holographic image of the painting that served as an entrance to the kitchens.

"I'd certainly pay more attention if I knew *why* I need to know how to make a pineapple dance across a table," said Harry as he made the map zoom in and out. "Let's try stacking the floor plans on top of each other this time."

"I know just the thing!" Hermione said eagerly.

Ron and Harry whooped and cheered when she made the image of ground floor appear on top of the image of the underground floor. As she watched the boys try it themselves, Hermione couldn't help but think how unthinkable the current situation was two months ago, and how much she desperately wished it would continue.

As far she could remember, Hermione wanted a friend with whom she could be as brainy as she wished. Hermione had hoped Harry would be that friend ever since he cast that very successful shrinking charm in the train and later turned his match into a needle in their first transfiguration class, the only one to do so. Unfortunately, Harry proved reluctant to talk about classes and homework for extracurricular purposes, leaving Hermione terribly disappointed. Then she overhead him discussing magic with Sherlock over the phone and felt betrayed. So Harry *did* like discussing magic! She had thought. He just didn't want to talk to *her* ! He was just like everyone else!

For by the time flying lessons started, all the other girls had paired off, leaving Hermione the odd one out. Not that it excused her behaviour, but Hermione had reacted mostly because she wanted Harry to *notice* she was as lonely as poor Neville, whom he clearly cared enough to check if he was back in the tower and made sure he was included when the first year boys played Muggle ball games. Really, when Harry didn't tell her what he was up to when she stayed up late in the common room because she was worried about him, it was adding insult to injury. Then he didn't even ask if there was anything wrong when she stopped calling her parents. Ron calling her a nightmare no one could stand, after a month of unbroken silence, was the final straw that broke the flood gates.

The misery of the thought she was destined for seven years of loneliness was what drove Hermione to the girl's toilet, crying. That no one came to check-never mind she said she wanted to be left

alone-had made her even more miserable. Then the troll came in, and all Hermione could think was: ' *This is just not FAIR!'* before succumbing to mindless terror.

Who would have thought Ron and Harry of all people would think of her after all that? Who would've guessed they would end up as friends afterwards? Or that they would play with magic as they were now? It was all so marvellous.

But it wasn't going to last, Hermione thought sadly. They would soon finish making the map. Harry would get his new phone and go back playing Quidditch. Then they would return to the days where she and Ron spent their time doing normal things while they waited for Harry to come back. Not that she hadn't been happy back then, but this past month had been bliss.

"Okay, now all we have to do is figure out how to make the map show your current location and give you directions!" said Harry.

"Yeah, that'll only take us another five years," said Ron, only half-jokingly.

"Or another five days," said Hermione, breaking out of her internal musings. "Professor Flitwick said he'd teach us how to do the path finder spell. It's adding it on top of all charms we've put so far that's going to be tricky."

"Can't be as bad as storing multiple holograms," said Harry. Then he looked up. "Oh, Hedwig!"

Hermione felt her heart sink a little when the snowy owl dropped a small package into Harry's lap. Harry thanked Hedwig first before eagerly tearing open the package. As expected, it contained a mobile phone-one of those old flip phones from years gone by. Stuck on the phone was a sticky note:

You should have all the necessary

data to find the culprit. Don't talk

to me until you figure it out.

HINT: put yourself in the thief's position

Final Notes : Snape finally meets Sherlock. (I've wanted to write that scene for ages!) McGonagall wasn't going to be there, originally, but then Malfoy decided to break Harry's phone, so she wouldn't cooperate. The conclusion of year one draws near. But when will I have time to write it, I wonder?

Magic Meets the Met

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

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Chapter Twelve: Magic Meets the MET

For yet another Saturday, Lestrade found himself in a dilapidated bedsit in a seedy part of London. This time he wasn't just dealing with a dead body, but also a giant Sumatran rat lying on its back with its paws in the air. While trying not to look too closely at the rodent, Lestrade tuned into the multithreaded conversation going on between his two consultants.

"Don't you think the note was too harsh? And that rat is *way* too big, even for London."

"Why? He needs training, not mollycoddling. Now please cease your imitation of Anderson."

"Shut up. Speaking of training, what do you think about pushing piano lessons over Skype?"

"That presumes technological competence from the teacher. Siger doesn't- no. *NO* . Absolutely not!"

"Why not? Jackie is a wonderful teacher, *and* a technological guru. Hey, do think this has to do with THAT?"

"Of course it has to do with it. And *no* . I refuse to adulterate Harry's

music education with pop-y nonsense Jacqueline inevitably descends to supposedly inspire students."

"The purely classical music education of Siger killed Harry's musical aspirations *dead* . All we have left is hope for resurrection. So I suppose we should be looking for a kid?"

"Seven, probably, no younger than five. Boy. His mother has unstable relationships with men and he reacted badly to the latest one. Check the roof."

"Don't tell me the murder was done by a seven-year-old kid," Lestrade said as John climbed out a window.

"Of course not," Sherlock scoffed. "It was the mother's *other* lover who did it. The child merely produced the rat."

Lestrade stole a glance at the rat, still too oversized by half. "Okay, how?"

"That's irrelevant," said Sherlock dismissively. "The question is, where is that child now?"

Lestrade couldn't argue against *that*, but normally from Sherlock's perspective of things, children and innocents were collaterals he chose to ignore.

That moment, John's upside-down head appeared at the window.

"Found him," said John, "Bring a ladder up, will you? And he needs a blanket."

The request was quickly transmitted over the walkie-talkie. John's head disappeared again. Lestrade heard a familiar adult's voice speaking soothingly and an unfamiliar child's voice responding in frightened tones. In the meantime, a steal ladder was brought up and put out halfway out the window. Lestrade let out a sigh of relief when John stepped on the ladder holding a little boy.

"There, there," said John, patting the trembling boy's head. "It'll be alright."

John wrapped the child in an orange fleece blanket the EMT units sent up, and then marched out of the bedsit. The boy buried his face into John's neck, sobbing quietly. The scene reminded Lestrade of another boy from years ago (had it been that long already?): Harry constantly and inexplicably finding himself up a ledge or on a roof, and John having to bring him down like a spooked raven in a tree.

Lestrade wrenched his attention back to Sherlock.

"Tell me about this other lover."

"It's obvious, isn't it?" said Sherlock. "The mother only had bruises on her fist, whereas the state of the victim suggests he put up a huge fight. There's allergy medication in the dresser and medicine cabinet, but neither the victim nor the mother and son are exhibiting allergy symptoms despite the amount of animal hair in this room and on the victim, who is a worker in a pet shop, judging from the sheer quantity of hair on his clothes. So what does that say? The victim is the mother's newer lover and the perpetuator was an older one, perhaps coming to realize the mother's infidelity through the sudden onset of allergies."

Lestrade nodded. "So where is that other lover now?"

"Locked room, blood splatters on the bottom threshold, and the presence of an unfamiliar handprint on the outer doorknob but not on the inner suggests the murderer never the left the bedsit," then, miraculously, Sherlock hesitated. "I would keep the rat incarcerated, if I were you."

"Why?"

" *Just do it*," said Sherlock through gritted teeth. "The rat is a clue. I need to sort it out."

Then Sherlock turned away and started poring over his phone. Lestrade knew he lost him for now.

"Right. Cage the rat. Let's see how that's going to go over the super…" Lestrade sighed. "Alright, guys, collect the rat. It's evidence. And for God's sake, don't call pest control!"

By the time his team had a firm enough grip to their grogs to approach the rat, Sherlock had already made his exit. Lestrade growled to himself as he headed out to see where he was off to. He was only slightly surprised to find Sherlock standing next to John, who was talking to the Social Worker they called for an emergency placement.

"-I recommend Mr. and Mrs. Boot. They're experienced foster parents," John was saying. "Sherlock has their contact info. I'm not sure if they're listed in your organization…"

"We'll figure that out," said the Social Worker. "You can't take him yourselves?"

"We *would*, but we have a son, older and freshly adopted, and I'm not sure if he's ready for another person in the house," said John.

The Social Worker sighed in obvious disappointment. John looked down patted the boy's head (he was fast asleep).

"What a trooper," John said fondly before looking up to Lestrade. "Ravi-that's his name by the way-says Mr. Sami came and tried to kill his mum and Mr. Dakhar-the victim-stepped in and got killed instead."

Lestrade jotted that down on his police notebook. Sherlock looked smug and vindicated.

"Better send the word out to find this Sami character," said Lestrade. "You're sure we still have to keep the rat?"

"Absolutely," said Sherlock. "Though I doubt anyone would want to keep close quarters to such a creature, do stay away from it for the time being."

"Wasn't planning on it," Lestrade groused. "Now get off of my crime scene."

They left. Lestrade lingered behind to have word with the Social Worker. Thus he was able to hear part of a bewildering (but domestic-sounding) conversation between John and Sherlock:

"Ah, Harry finished the game in seven minutes. I knew he was a smart one (not wasting his time)."

" *What?* ! Dammit, Snape, videos! I told you to take videos!"

"Obviously he hasn't overcome the technological challenges. Do work harder, John…"

Harry left the Hospital Wing that evening, grinning. Vindication never felt to so sweet. He caught the snitch in record time, thus putting to rest all those rumours that his Quidditch playing days ended before it even properly started. The post-game party afterwards was wonderful. Gryffindor was in the lead and he didn't have to get sick for it. As icing on the cake, Ron gave Malfoy a black-eye and Neville stood up against Crabbe and Goyle single-handed at the stands (he was going to be fine; Harry went to check). They've really showed those Slytherins and Snape.

Speaking of Snape…

Harry stared the hooded figure swiftly leaving the Entrance Hall. He could recognise that prowling walk anywhere: it was Snape. What was he doing, leaving the castle when everyone else was at dinner?

Harry hesitated. Tailing Snape, especially after a Gryffindor victory, was an act of suicide. But he was intensely curious, and Snape was acting suspiciously (again).

Harry went down the marble staircase and turned left. Instead of going to the Great Hall, he took the stone staircase leading to the Kitchens.

Harry waited patiently for the House-elves to stop bowing and curtseying before he opened his mouth.

"Blippy? Can you do something for me?"

"Harry, where have you *been* ?" Hermione squeaked.

"Did Madam Pomfrey give you a hard time?" Ron asked. "Fred and George are going to sneak into the kitchens again for a second party after dinner, by the way, so don't eat too much."

"No, I just had to stop by at the kitchens," said Harry breathlessly as he sat down at the Gryffindor table.

"Why?" asked Hermione.

"I'll tell you after dinner," said Harry.

The three of them ate dinner hastily and looked for an empty room. Harry made sure Peeves wasn't inside before shutting the door behind them.

"Blippy?" Harry called out.

With a crack, Blippy the House-elf appeared inside the room, clutching an ancient mobile phone that looked older than they were.

"Blippy recorded everything, Harry Potter!" said Blippy in a high-pitched voice full of pride, brandishing the phone.

"Thank you so much, Blippy," said Harry as he took back the phone. "You're an awesome house-elf."

Blippy bowed low and vanished from the room with another crack. Harry then told Ron and Hermione what he saw at the Entrance Hall and that he asked Blippy to spy on Snape and record what he was up to.

"But Harry, your phone doesn't have a video-cam," said Hermione.

"That's what Sherlock wanted everyone to think," said Harry.

He carefully snapped open the battered plastic casing. Hidden inside, underneath the fake circuit board and battery, was a smart phone even more cutting-edge than his old one.

" *Brilliant* !" Ron exclaimed as Hermione sputtered in outrage.

Harry quickly played the video Blippy recorded for him. All they

could *see* was dirt, rotting foliage and gnarled tree roots, but the human voices were unmistakable:

"… d-d-don't know why you wanted t-to meet here of all p-places, Severus…" said Quirrell, his stutter was worse than ever.

"Oh, I thought we'd keep this private," said Snape, his voice icy. "Students aren't supposed to know about the Philosopher's Stone, after all."

Harry, Ron and Hermione shared triumphant looks. So they were right about the stone.

"Have you found out how to get past that beast of Hagrid's yet?" said Snape.

"B-b-but Severus, I-"

"You don't want me as your enemy, Quirrell."

"I-I don't know what you-"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

An owl hooted loudly, so they couldn't make out what Snape said afterwards except for the tail-end of it, "-your little bit of hocus-pocus. I'm waiting."

"B-but I d-d-don't-"

"Very well," Snape cut in. "We'll have another little chat soon, when you've had time to think things over and decided where your loyalties lie."

There was a swish of a cloak and footsteps. The video ended shortly thereafter. Harry, Ron and Hermione stared at each other, stunned.

"So Snape was after the stone after all, and he's trying to get Quirrell to help him," said Ron in a hushed voice.

"No, that can't be it," Hermione protested. "Snape didn't take the chance to steal the stone at the Quidditch match, remember?"

"Then what else were they talking about?" Ron argued.

Harry stood there while his friends bickered, thinking hard with his eyes screwed shut. The answer was just out of his reach, he knew it: Quirrell and his stutter, getting worse by the hour; Snape, prowling around checking security like a paranoid bat; the stone, Hagrid's three-headed dog, the Gringott's break-in that happened last summer…

Then insight exploded inside Harry's head like a supernova.

"That's it," he said breathlessly. "No wonder Sherlock wanted us to think from the Thief's point of view!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Hermione.

" *Think* !" said Harry, splaying his hands to either side of his head. "You're the thief. You break into Gringotts thinking the stone is there, but it isn't. Snape can't be the thief because he was there when Hagrid took the stone out of the vault. He had his chance then but didn't take it, and he wouldn't go through the trouble of breaking into Gringotts after all that. Anyway, you somehow find out the stone is in Hogwarts. You found a way to enter Hogwarts, but you can't get pass Fluffy and the other security measures around the stone. You need help: someone who knows how to get passed security or someone who can get that information for you. Of all the teachers, who is the easiest to target?"

"Quirrell," said Ron quickly. "He's scared of his own shadow. You can scare him to cooperate."

"So you do that," Harry went on. "That's probably why Quirrell's trembling and stuttering is getting worse. After going through all that since last summer, I'm surprised he didn't have a nervous breakdown earlier."

"And Snape found this out," said Hermione. "That's what the chat was for! He wanted to know if Quirrell was helping or resisting!"

"Knowing Snape, he probably thinks Quirrell is helping, but not doing a good job at it," said Harry. "But that's it! The thief is whoever

is threatening Quirrell!"

They were silent for a beat.

"So the stone is safe as long as Quirrell keeps standing up against the thief?" said Hermione in alarm.

"It'll be gone by next Tuesday," said Ron.

Lestrade wearily stumbled into his car after a long day at the office. The super (the new one that got the job after the old one got sacked for the Richard Brooke fiasco) had kept him late asking him over and over the purpose of keeping a Giant Rat of Sumatra in the evidence locker. As telling the new super 'because Sherlock said so' wasn't even an option, Lestrade had to use his horrible dissembling skills. And that was the easier part of the day. Now he had to pick up his kids from his former in-laws.

It was unfortunate they couldn't afford a minder, Lestrade thought. He'd been born out of wedlock, and his mum left him in her mother's care when he was two. He hadn't seen his mum since then, and his grandmother passed away when he was sixteen. Ellen was orphaned after her eighteenth birthday, and had to quit school to take over the family florist business. The only thing close to an extended family they had was Lestrade's dead wife, Cecilia's, parents and her younger siblings. They'd been kind enough to look after Julia when he was young widower walking the beat, and later looked after the kids he had later whenever he needed a minder. Still, Lestrade could never shake the feeling he was going to be shot on sight and buried in the back garden for his transgressions whenever he visited his in-law's house.

Lestrade braced himself for the familiar feeling of purified hostility as he parked his car at the driveway. He heard the sound of a piano playing and was reminded of the other reason why he couldn't afford to stop taking the kids to Cecilia's parents. One simply didn't find minders who had trained at the Royal Academy of Music and offered free music lessons on top of free child minding services in this day and age. The boys didn't have the capacity to appreciate this, but

Julia, who got her brains and talent from her mum, more than made up for their slack.

"Greg," said his former father-in-law, patriarch of the Shin family, as he opened the door. As always, he was expressionless and toneless. Lestrade often wondered if his father-in-law actually had the capacity to emote.

"Sir," said Lestrade, trying not to fidget. "Uh, Julia's not done yet?"

His father-in-law shook his head. Then he glided back inside the house. Lestrade winced when he heard a crash and the sound of his boys rampaging like a herd of Bull Elephants. He rushed into the parlour to tell them off.

He stopped short when he saw Sherlock, looking terribly upset.

"Why are you here?" he demanded.

Sherlock glared at him. "John refused to budge on the subject of piano instructors."

Lestrade blinked. Then he remembered the conversation that happened in a London bedsit and grinned.

"Lost the argument, yeah?" said Lestrade.

Sherlock gave him a look of pure hatred. Lestrade decided then and there to tell everyone in bullpen about this the next time he went to the station.

"I know you're still new to the whole parenting thing, Sherlock, but just so you know: the wife always wins," Lestrade said cheekily.

"Oh, shut up," Sherlock grumbled.

They waited together. Lestrade listened to Julia play something that sounded too dreadfully complicated and classical for a ten-year-old. Sherlock complained the sound of Lestrade's breathing wasn't helping him think. In retaliation, he called the boys to his side so they could all squirm and respire loudly in Sherlock proximity.

" *You're not helping*," growled Sherlock, looking positively murderous.

Just then, Julia ran out of the music room, beaming and squealing, "Daddy!"

Lestrade felt the burdens of the day drop off. "Hello sweetheart."

Julia nuzzled her face in his chest and Lestrade held her close. Sherlock made gagging noises.

"Okay, kids, we're going home. Say goodbye to grandpa and Aunt Jackie," said Lestrade as Julia clung to him. "And don't forget your stuff!"

The boys scampered off to collect their toys. Julia mumbled something about leaving her bag in the music room. Knowing Julia would've filled her bag to the point of bursting with books, Lestrade headed there.

"No, Daddy, I can do it myself," said Julia firmly. The sort of firm that meant she wanted to hide something.

"I'm sure you can," said Lestrade easily as he continued his way to the music room.

"No, really!" said Julia, clutching at his sleeve and trying not to sound as agitated as she actually was.

"Mmmhmmm," said Lestrade. He opened the door.

Lestrade blinked several times to make sure his eyes were working. Where there was a small potted Orchard, there was an overgrown *and still visibly growing* plant that covered the entire length of the piano, with blooming Orchards and Jasmine flowers everywhere. The sweet smell of Jasmine was overpowering.

"What a surprise," said Sherlock dryly. "Lestrade, your daughter is a witch."

Three cups of tea, twenty minutes of sitting down and collecting his sanity later, Lestrade finally looked up to face his in-laws. He immediately went back into shock when he saw the obvious regret on his father-in-law's face.

"I'm sorry, Greg," said Mr. Shin quietly. "I rather hoped it wouldn't happen like this."

Lestrade shook his head. He didn't know what to say.

"She gets it from my bloodline," his father-in-law explained. "The Shin family has produced those with the *ability* for last thirty-six generations."

"Ability?" Lestrade breathed.

"Magic," said Sherlock. "The British users call it magic. Not the illusion kind, but the ability to actually bend matter and space at will."

"Right. Magic," Lestrade said, dazed. "Julia has magic."

"Yes, she's a witch. Do keep up," said Sherlock impatiently. "I can't believe you didn't notice strange things happening around her whenever her emotions were at height."

Lestrade glared at Sherlock. As a matter of fact, he *had* noticed strange things happened to Julia whenever she was upset. There was that incident of the frozen toad when she was three, and the zombie tulip Julia loved to pieces that refused to wilt for the last seven years. All the electronics in the flat would die an inexplicable death whenever he stayed at the office too long when Julia was younger, but it had stopped after he married Ellen. He'd dismissed those incidents as freak accidents, but he hadn't forgotten about them.

"So all that… *stuff* was her magic acting?" asked Lestrade.

"Yes," his father-in-law replied. "Magic triggers uncontrollably until you learn to harness it."

"And you know this already, how?" Lestrade demanded to Sherlock.

"Harry is a wizard," Sherlock said.

Lestrade clutched his head between his hands. This was too much. All this time he'd thought his in-laws were dour but kindly immigrants, who had one rebellious daughter whom he married, and Harry a poor traumatized normal kid who had the strange fortune to be adopted by Sherlock Holmes. Now his in-laws turned out to be a family of bloody *sorcerers*, his daughter inherited the same power, what that meant for her future he couldn't even imagine, Harry was a wizard and oh gawd he needed a drink.

"It's not as bad as it seems," said his father-in-law calmly. "Cecilia we sent to a school of magic because her power was too strong and obvious. Jacqueline only had enough to notice magic when present, so we raised her as an ordinary person. Julia is somewhere in between: she can choose to ignore it or harness it."

Lestrade looked up. "So it's not-" he made a vague hand-gesture.

"No," his father-in-law confirmed.

Lestrade sighed in relief.

But of course, Sherlock wouldn't leave it at that.

"Oh, don't be boring," Sherlock spat. To Julia, who Lestrade just noticed was crying silently behind her grandpa, the prat said in his most hypnotic voice: "Did you know this school of Magic is a large castle up Scotland?"

Julia stared at him, wide-eyed. Sherlock put a shite-eating grin.

"There's a magical entrance in King's Cross station between platforms nine and ten," said Sherlock. "Once you walk pass that entrance, you'll find the hidden platform of nine and three quarters . A scarlet steam engine called the *Hogwarts Express* takes you to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It's an enchanted castle with which Disney can never hope to compete. It boasts no less than a hundred forty-two staircases; wide ones, sweeping ones, rickety ones, one that lead you to a different place on Friday, and one with a vanishing step half-way you have to remember to jump.

There're doors pretending to be walls, and walls pretending to be doors. The coats of armour walk and portraits visit each other whenever they fancy."

Julia was hanging onto Sherlock's every word. So was Lestrade. His father-in-law, on the other hand, looked irate.

"Mr. Holmes, if you don't silence right now, I will hit you with this cello," his father-in-law threatened.

"There's more to magic than waving a wand and saying a few funny words," Sherlock went on. "There're greenhouses for magical herbs and fungi, and potions class in the dungeons. Every week students study the skies through telescopes. Of course there's the expected wand waving and spells. Which brings me to the subject of teachers."

Sherlock dodged the electric cello his father-in-law swung at his head.

"Charms is taught by tiny Professor Flitwick!" said Sherlock, still dodging. "He's so small he has to - *uff* - stand on top of a pile of books to see over his desk! And History of Magic is taught by a *ghost* - an actual *ghost* !"

Sherlock started to run away as his father-in-law went after him with an axe he produced out of nowhere.

"Rumour has it the history teacher fell asleep in the staff room and woke up next morning and left his body behind!" Sherlock shouted as he ran, his voice phasing out due to the Doppler affect. "Then there's madam Hooch, who teaches you how to *fly on a broomstick* !"

" *BEGONE* !" shouted his father-in-law.

Sherlock took off. Lestrade and Julia watched him run away for dear life.

At length, Lestrade took in a deep breath and looked at his daughter.

"Julia, come here," he said.

Julia bowed her head and took a step forward. Lestrade felt his heart clench.

"Oh, sweetie," said Lestrade, lifting her up like she was a toddler. It wasn't very hard-Julia was small for her age. "I don't care what you are. You're still my little girl."

Immediately Julia tried to strangle him and cried into his shoulder. Lestrade patted the back of her head.

"You've been hiding this for while, haven't you?" said Lestrade. "Did you think I'd get mad if I found out?"

Julia nodded into his shoulder.

"It was a shock," Lestrade admitted. "But I think I can get used to it. If Mr. Science of Deduction can handle magic, so can I."

"… Are you going to tell Ellen?" asked Julia.

Lestrade thought about it. Julia was probably more worried about Ellen's reaction than she was about his. Ellen was a sweet woman, but she and Julia had clashing personalities. Bringing up Magic would no doubt add another wedge to their relationship.

"It's going to come up sooner or later," Lestrade said. "We'll find a good time to let her know."

Julia clung to him and said nothing. Lestrade knew what she was thinking, and he had to agree; if they couldn't tell her now, what made them think they could in the future?

" *How* in the world did you manage to get banned from Jackie's house?" John demanded when Sherlock returned to Baker Street.

"I just told Lestrade about Hogwarts when he discovered his daughter is a witch," said Sherlock. "The grandfather objected to it rather violently."

John stared at him. "Julia Lestrade is a witch."

"I'm surrounded by parrots," Sherlock groused. "Yes, magic runs from her mother's side of the family."

John continued to stare. "Didn't it occur to you the family might have a reason to not want to talk about Magic?"

"Of course not. I was too preoccupied at their insistence of being dull."

John sighed. "Why do I bother?"

"Indeed, why?" Sherlock taunted.

"For that, I'm going to delete the text Harry sent about the Philosopher's stone thief before you read it," John taunted right back.

A long and furious scuffle commenced in 221B. John elbowed Sherlock in the face, and Sherlock attempted to put John in an arm-lock and got thrown into a wall for his pains. But Sherlock was a seasoned pick-pocket, so he got hold of John's phone before he hit the wall.

"Ah, so he found the Quirrell connection," said Sherlock as he quickly read through the text full of typos and net-speak. "Not bad for an eleven-year-old."

"So he's on the right track?" said John.

"He's still needs to think it more carefully," said Sherlock, tossing the phone back to John. "Remind him of Occam's razor."

John frowned. "Do you mean…?"

" *Yes*," said Sherlock.

"I guess it's a lesson on first impressions, too," John remarked while typing a reply.

Harry snatched his phone from his bedside cabinet the moment he heard the alert. He frowned at the message:

Occam's Razor. First impressions do lie. JW

Final Notes : I am soooo sorry for the long delay. I've working on my master's thesis, signed up for my final class and switched jobs. All in one month. I don't expect to have a lot of time in the future, so I apologize in advance.

Security and Logic in Fairy Land

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirteen: Security and Logic in Fairy Land

Harry, Ron and Hermione kept a close watch over Quirrell in the weeks that followed (John told them they were on the right track about him in a second text that made a lot more sense than the first one about Occam's razor). Quirrell was apparently braver than they gave him credit for. He did seem to get thinner and paler, but it didn't look as though he'd cracked yet. Snape continued to prowl around in a bad temper, which meant the stone was still safe. Harry, Ron and Hermione took turns pressing an ear against the entrance to the forbidden third floor corridor to check if Fluffy was still growling inside. Harry made it a point to thank Quirrell for his efforts, and Ron started telling people off for laughing at his stutter.

Hermione, however, had other things on her mind besides the stone and Quirrell. Around the end of March, she started colour-coding all her notes and draw up study schedules. Harry and Ron wouldn't have minded, except she kept nagging them to do the same.

"Hermione, the exams are ages away."

"Ten weeks," Hermione snapped. "That's not ages. It's only two and a half a months."

"That *is* ages," said Ron. "What are you studying for anyway, you already know it all."

"What am I studying for?Are you *crazy* !? You realise we need to pass these exams to get into second year? They're very important! I should've started studying a month ago I don't know what came over me…"

Unfortunately, the teachers were thinking on the same lines as Hermione. They piled so much homework on them Harry had to spend every spare minute of his time trying to finish them all before Easter holidays. Unlike the majority of Hogwarts, Harry was going back to London, and he didn't want homework hovering over his head.

"Of course I'm going," Harry said as he trudged after Hermione to the library, moaning and yawning alongside Ron, as she fretted over his two week break from studying as if it was a bad thing. "I haven't seen John and Sherlock for six *months* ."

Harry still had a great deal of homework left over when the holidays rolled around. He fell into a fretful, exhausted sleep the moment he settled into the train, thinking he'd likely be in sixth year before he finished writing all his Potions essays. After the nap, he felt more relaxed and optimistic. So Harry spent the remainder of the train ride playing Exploding Snap with Terry and Justin, who were going home too.

"I'm going to have a brother!" Terry said excitedly. "His name is Ravi and he's six. Mum says he's a half-blood raised by his Muggle Mum."

"Do you have others brothers or sisters?" Harry asked.

"Two sisters: There's Brianna, and she's two. Olga we adopted from Ukraine."

Harry smiled. This was what he really liked about Terry and his family. Mr. and Mrs. Boot considered anyone they fostered as family, and Terry loved having more siblings. Harry couldn't really share that part of his life with Ron and Hermione since they never

had the need to have another family except the one they were born to.

"I'd like to meet them," said Harry.

"You can visit us over Easter holidays. What are your plans?"

"I have a bunch of doctor appointments this week-Madam Pomfrey's going to kill me if I don't go to all of them," said Harry regretfully. "Next week I'm going to Sussex."

"Busy, aren't you?" said Justin. "I suppose you'd be spending the evening with family. What about the summer?"

Harry had a lot of plans for the summer, too. He, Ron and Hermione had agreed to a Star Wars marathon. Ron and his brothers had already invited him for an extended visit at their home, and he and Dean were going to play football every week until then. It was surreal, now that Harry thought about it. He had a normal, ordinary life going on despite the unnatural shadow cast by the philosopher's stone.

"When does your family normally go to Diagon Alley? I can meet you there," said Harry.

"Ooooh, good idea. We can have lunch together at the Leaky Cauldron," said Terry happily.

"Mother likes to do shopping in London-perhaps I can meet you on one of her trips?" said Justin.

Harry grinned.

For the nth time, Ron was grateful Harry left his phone with them. The original intent was so Hermione could call her parents. Ron ended up using it to call Harry when watching Hermione recite the twelve uses of Dragon blood or practicing wand movements became too much.

"Why is she memorizing the twelve uses of Dragon Blood for? We

didn't even learn that in class!" said Harry.

"That's what Hermione does," Ron groaned. "When it doubt, learn it all."

Ron cast a furtive eye at Madam Pince and then at Hermione, who was off looking for another book to devour, before he went back pretending to look up 'Dittany' from his copy of *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi* .

"Hey, do you remember the last text Sherlock sent over Christmas holidays?" said Harry in hushed whisper.

"Yeah, something about John's missing body parts growing back. So what was it, wings?"

"No. It's, um, something else. I noticed it the moment I got back to London. I just haven't told you."

Typical Harry, Ron thought.

"You're riling me up, mate. What is it?"

Harry hemmed and hawed for a long moment.

"… You know, John used to have a flat che-"

Ron's jaw dropped. Then he flushed up to his ears tips.

"Nooooo waaaaay… !"

" *They grew back*," said Harry, sounding stunned, "Sergeant Donovan's been asking me if I'm going to have a baby brother soon. John is *furious* ."

Ron felt lost. "What does that have to do with- Hagrid! What are you doing in the library?"

Hagrid hid whatever he was holding behind his back. He looked very out of place in his moleskin overcoat.

"Nuthin'," he said in a shifty voice. "What're you up ter? Still looking

up potions for Harry's Muggle Mum?"

"Nah, someone else gave her what she needed. This is just homework," said Ron. "Seriously, Hagrid, what's up?"

" *Shhhhh!* " Hagrid looked around quickly to see if anyone was listening. "Don't go shouting in the library, what's the matter with yeh?"

Ron frowned. Hagrid was practically radiating 'suspicious', jumping at small noises, warily glancing about and refusing to answer his questions. After Hagrid left the library, mumbling excuses and inviting him over for tea, Ron walked over to the shelf Hagrid had been at. The books there were about dragons: *Dragon Species of Great Britain and Ireland*, *From Egg to Inferno, A Dragon Keeper's Guide* and *Men Who Love Dragons Too Much* .

"Wonder what it's like to have a peaceful life," Ron sighed as he started updating Harry on the latest news.

"This is a security *nightmare*," John grumbled as Harry and Sherlock listened in to Hagrid telling Ron and Hermione how he went down to the village pub for a drink, got into a game of cards with a stranger and won an illegal dragon egg from him-which the stranger only handed over to Hagrid after he confessed to knowing how to tame three-headed monster dogs (they fell asleep with a bit of music… *why?* !)

"To be fair, he did get a genuine dragon egg," said Sherlock, as he stared greedily at the video feed of the enormous black egg sitting beneath a kettle, right in the heart of the fire.

"The one thing Hagrid wanted since he was a kid, which a stranger rather conveniently happened to have," John pointed out. "I'm texting Snape and Hermione."

Harry practically jumped out of his skin. "Snape? You talk to *Snape!* ?"

Sherlock looked at Harry like he was stupid. "Well, of course, he's

your *teacher* . Who else could we be talking to?"

"Professor McGonagall! Professor Dumbledore!" *Anyone but Snape!* Harry thought savagely.

"We talk to them, too," said John. "But this situation calls for immediate attention. Owl post takes hours and a phone takes seconds. Snape has a mobile phone and knows how to use it. You do the math."

Hedwig hooted loudly in protest. Harry opened and closed his mouth. The idea of Snape being friendly with John was an outrage. It felt like a betrayal.

"You really don't like him, do you?" said John after sending the texts.

"He's *evil*," Harry said hotly. "You should see what he does to Neville in potions! He's a big bullying git!"

"I don't have to see it. I can imagine it all too well." John sighed. "Harry, just because someone is a big, bullying git doesn't mean you're permitted to be a git back."

"But he's-!"

John placed a finger on Harry's mouth.

"It's not that I don't care," said John quietly. "It bothers me all the time. Nothing will convince me what Snape is doing to his students is excusable, and I think it's amazing you're not giving him the satisfaction of doing badly at Potions because of him. I just thought you wouldn't give him the satisfaction of making you unkind either."

Harry felt his self-righteous anger deflate, leaving icky mess of guilt in its wake. John always believed in him, always believed he was a better person, even when all of his teachers in Surrey said he was mediocre, problematic and shut down. That trust didn't waver even when his new teachers in London said within weeks of his transfer he was emotionally unstable and defiant, getting into fights, mouthing off and prone to silent screaming fits because he couldn't handle the monsters inside his head, overwhelmed at the idea his desperate wish to escape the Dursleys had left so many people

dead. John just waited patiently for the storm to die down, and promised him over and over that it gets better. When it did get better, Harry vowed to never disappoint John again. He was feeling rather proud of himself for doing a decent job. Now look at what he did.

"Being angry on behalf of Neville is good, though," John said. "The poor kid needs a break. Why don't you invite him to the Star Wars marathon?"

"Okay," said Harry quickly. "Uh, won't Hagrid get into trouble?"

"He's *already* in trouble," growled John. "Not saying anything is only going to make the trouble bigger. Remember Harry: when you detect a security breech, you alert the appropriate chain-of-command unless *you* happen to be the appropriate chain-of-command."

"And Snape is an appropriate chain-of-command," said Harry dubiously.

"Obviously," said Sherlock. He had an odd look on his face-a mixture of fascination and fondness directed at John's back, which vanished the moment John turned around. "Dumbledore may be reckless in whom he trusts, but he isn't stupid. He'd put in security measures that would hold even if the *details* of the security measures are revealed."

"Huh?" said Harry, confused.

"Hagrid just told Hermione who helped set up the security measures," said Sherlock, chortling silently. "That girl is *clever* . She wondered out loud who Dumbledore could trust even more than even Hagrid *.* Hagrid spilled it all in a heartbeat: Sprout, Flitwick, McGonagall, Quirrell and Snape- Dumbledore, too, of course. Not exactly a hard secret to know, is it? Meaning, it doesn't *matter* if you know who set up security."

John face-palmed hard, and then typed up another text. Harry read message:

Snape, for the love of God, what is AD thinking?

The answer was almost instant.

I've asked myself that question more times than I care to admit. Even after a decade, the answer is not forthcoming.

"Of course," John sighed, while Harry just sat, profoundly disturbed at the notion of a technology-literate Snape. "Sherlock, why *wouldn't* knowing who set up security matter?"

"Because magic is like fairytales," Sherlock explained. "Why do you have to sing the right song for the red river part? And why do you have the kiss the frog for it to turn back into a prince? *Because that is the imposed condition* . The arbitrariness of the condition does not matter. Nor does the person who set up the condition, though I suppose the type of condition could depend on the spell-caster. You merely need to know the right condition to get around security in Fairy Land."

Harry started to understand.

"So even if you can guess one of the security spells around the stone is a transfiguration one since Professor McGonagall helped, if you don't know the counter condition, you can't do anything."

"Precisely," said Sherlock. "Knowing Dumbledore, *his* enchantment will go far beyond knowing the correct spell."

John nodded thoughtfully.

"I wonder what it is," said John.

Next morning, Ron told Harry that Professor Dumbledore went down to the gamekeeper's hut for a brief meeting. Hagrid then told Ron and Hermione (and Harry, who was on the phone) that the Headmaster had contacted Ron's older brother Charlie and made arrangements to move the dragon out of Hogwarts and into the wild dragon reserve Charlie was working at. It would be weeks before this could happen, though, so they'd be able to watch the dragon

egg hatch before then (Sherlock demanded a live video feed of this event).

Hagrid was deeply disappointed that he couldn't keep the baby dragon.

"I knew I couldn' keep it forever," mumbled Hagrid into the phone. "And I'm grateful I can at least see it hatch-great man, Dumbledore-but… *but*… I thought I could keep it a little longer…"

Hagrid then started howling so uncontrollably, they couldn't get another word out of him. Harry tried not to feel too sorry about it. As Hermione pointed out, Hagrid lived in a *wooden house* .

The rest of the Easter break went without a hitch. Harry quietly marvelled at how easy it was to slip back into the Muggle world. Here and there a familiar-looking police officer would ask 'how is school?' Harry would say 'good', and that was the end of it. It helped that John's magic-induced changes drew horrified fascination from all quarters. John took to answering the increasingly blunt questions with an equally blunt: "No, I'm just getting fat."

"How come everyone is only noticing it just now?" Harry asked after his appointment with Mr. Samsara, who did his blood work, casually mentioned: 'Dr. Watson, you seem to have regained full health. Any good news?'

"Parkas," said John. "I've been wearing parkas until recently. Now it's too warm to wear them."

Between the plethora of doctor appointments-and Harry swore if he got his blood drawn *one more time* he was going to shrivel up like a wrinkled mummy-his cello/piano lessons resumed. Everything Harry learned about bowing had somehow leaked out of his head over the last six months, so he was making the same horrible screeching noises from last year when he'd just started learning how to play a cello. As for his piano lessons, Harry was secretly relieved when Mr. Sigered sacked him as a student halfway into his first lesson.

"I'm sure Siger will be more than happy to teach our non-existent biological child Sergeant Donavan swears I'm having once he's old

enough," said John sardonically. "I'll ask Jackie next Tuesday."

Sherlock pouted. Harry tried not to follow his example. If Harry had his way, he wouldn't have *any* music lessons. But music lessons was one thing Sherlock and John were both adamant about, so there was no going around it.

"How far are you in finishing your homework?" asked John. "Think you'll be done before we go to Sussex?"

Harry fisted his hair. He'd been *trying* . Really, he had. But he was nowhere close to finishing. As evidence of his futile efforts, his Potions textbooks were spread all over the sitting room table and the communal laptop had his marginally-written essay up. Hermione had sent him *another* Potions study schedule she somehow drew up using Google Docs-supposedly to help him. It was driving him nuts.

John chuckled. "You look like me back when I was learning immunology."

"Potions can't be that difficult, it's just like Applied Chemistry," said Sherlock.

"Harry hasn't *learned* any applied chemistry," John pointed out. "And didn't you say Magic is like fairytales?"

Sherlock let out a very put-upon sigh.

"This is the problem with you normal people, always bogged down by the trappings of logic rather than logic itself," Sherlock griped. To Harry he said: "Chemistry is *basic logic* : a chain of conditions and results. And everything follows logic, even fairytales. Just because the relationship between the condition and result seems arbitrary doesn't mean the sequence of conditions and results are arbitrary as well. Don't trip over the arbitrary relationship between stirring three times counter-clockwise and the production of a cure for boils. Stirring counter-clockwise is the *condition* . The boil curing potion is the *result* . A then B. That's simple logic. As long as you know all the basic conditions and their results, figuring out the sequence should be simple enough."

"But how am I supposed to do *that* ?" asked Harry, dismayed.

"I keep all known basic chemical reactions in my Mind Palace," said Sherlock. "That's how I identify them. There is no other way, I'm afraid."

Harry frowned. "What's a *mind palace* ?"

Harry ended up learning how to build a Memory Palace (or use the method of loci, as John put it) instead of doing his Potions homework that day. It was rather interesting: Sherlock used the layout of his childhood home in Kent to organize his chemistry knowledge, and the streets of London to organize his criminology ones. Harry decided to use Hogwarts as his memory palace. He didn't go beyond the Gryffindor Common room and his memory retrieval was rather dismal. But Harry was sure the trick John taught him of writing down everything he memorized on a sheet of parchment as soon as an exam started would come handy later.

Hermione and Ron waited for Harry show up at the Great Hall. They eventually spotted him lugging around a long, peculiarly shaped backpack that was almost as big as he was.

"What is that?" asked Ron, pointing at it.

Harry gave them a hooded, deadpan look.

"I've started cello lessons-again," he said, doing the Jedi mind control hand motion.

Hermione suppressed a grin and Ron sniggered. Harry's sigh was only half-serious.

"I have lessons over Skype three times a week. As if I don't have enough to do. At least my tutor isn't Mr. Sigered."

Ron asked about his holiday, and Harry told them about his trip to Sussex. Sherlock had taken him and John there to introduce them to his great-uncle Jeremy and his friend Dr. Edward Littlejohn. Jeremy Oswald Necropolis Æthelbert Bell-Holmes ("Your great-uncle has

my condolences. Your family is not allowed to name our hypothetical children, by the way," John had declared, to which Sherlock replied: "Yes dear.") was Sherlock's favourite relative. He had taught Mycroft and later Sherlock how to observe and deduce people, and spent many happy hours with a young Sherlock putting together a life-size human skeleton replica ("So much more interesting than those jigsaw puzzles Uncle Aubrey insisted on gifting," Sherlock had said).

"So how is Hagrid?" Harry asked.

"Mental," said Ron, shaking his head. "Yesterday we saw him stroking the egg and singing a lullaby. I don't know how he's going to cope when Charlie comes to pick it up."

"When is it going hatch, do you know?"

"Hagrid's going to send us an owl."

They went abruptly silent when they noticed Malfoy walking nearby. He didn't seem to notice them, though, and appeared mulish and angry.

"Bet you he's going to detention," said Ron gleefully as they walked away.

"Did he ever pay you back for breaking your old phone?" asked Hermione.

"I don't know," said Harry. "But I'm guessing he did. Sherlock couldn't have bought my new one if he didn't."

As if on cue, Harry's new phone vibrated. They ducked behind a suit of armour to check the message:

Breech confirmed. Fluffy was neutralized for ten minutes. The thief could not get pass AD's security however. SH

"Ha!" said Harry triumphantly.

"I should've known," said Ron. "Of course Dumbledore would've put up something clever."

Hermione let out a sigh of relief. At last, they had a good reason to stop worrying about the stone. Good thing too - the exams were coming in only six weeks.

A week after Easter Holidays at breakfast time, Hedwig gave them a note from Hagrid. It was short:

It's hatching .

Ron wanted to skip Herbology and go straight to Hagrid's. Harry was inclined to agree. Hermione had to put her foot down.

"But Hermione, how many times in our lives are we going to see a dragon hatching?" Ron argued.

"We have lessons, we'll get into trouble, and that's nothing to what Hagrid's going to be in if someone else finds out what he's been doing-"

" *Shut up!* " Harry hissed.

They all looked up and saw Malfoy. He was only a few feet away and he wasn't walking. Hermione did not like the look on his face.

After much arguing (with Ron), Hermione agreed to head to Hagrid's during morning break. As soon as the bell rang at the end of class, they dropped their trowels and raced across the grounds to the edge of the forest. Besides Hagrid, who looked flushed and excited as he quickly shuffled them into the darkly lit room after peering out from a crack in the window, there was an unfamiliar, stocky red-headed person inside the hut. Hermione instantly knew who he was from his weather-beaten complexion, freckles, singed hair and the shiny burn right beneath it.

"Charlie!" cried Ron. "When did you get here?"

Charlie Weasley beamed at Ron.

"Just last night-and hello," He looked at Harry and Hermione. "You two must be Ron's friends."

The handshaking was interrupted by the loud, crackling sound coming from the table. Everyone gathered around the egg lying on its centre. Harry took out his phone and started filming. The egg trembled several times, and more deep cracks appeared on its shiny, metallic black shell. A funny clicking noise came from within.

At last the egg split open, and the long-anticipated/dreaded baby dragon flopped into view.

"Isn't he *beautiful* ?" murmured Hagrid, misty-eyed.

Harry muttered something about crumpled black umbrellas. Hermione had to agree with the description: The baby dragon was an ugly thing with large spiny wings, a skinny jet body and a long snout with wide nostrils, horn stubs and bulging, orange eyes. When Hagrid reached out to stroke its head, the dragon snapped at his fingers.

"Got anything to feed it?" asked Charlie, as he shook his head fondly.

"Got a bucket o' brandy mixed with chicken blood other there," said Hagrid, absently waving a hand the size of a dustbin. "Read it outta *Dragon Breeding for Pleasure and Profit* . A bit outta date, o' course, but it's all in there."

"That it is," Charlie agreed.

The dragon sneezed. A couple of sparks flew out of its snout.

"So when are you taking it to Romania?" asked Ron.

"Tonight," said Charlie. "Best do this quickly before it gets any bigger. Norwegian Ridgebacks can grow up to three times in size in a week."

Harry winced. Then his glance shot to the curtained window.

"There was someone peeking from the window!" he said.

They bolted to the door and peered out. Malfoy was hurrying back to the castle-he'd seen the dragon.

"Change of plans," said Charlie, as he quickly shut the door. "I'm taking it *now* ."

"No," said Hagrid. "Yeh can't. He's too little. See, he only just recognised his mummy. Norbert! Norbert, where's Mummy?"

"He lost his marbles," muttered Ron.

"Can't let Norbert get too attached to his mummy," said Charlie, lips twitching. "C'mon Hagrid, let it go."

Charlie eventually wrestled Norbert the baby dragon into a fireproof box. He almost got bitten five times before he successfully closed and locked the lid. He would've finished the job sooner except Hagrid wanted to make sure Norbert had enough to eat, so he stuffed the box with rats and several skins of brandy-chicken blood mix first. He even put in a teddy bear in case Norbert got lonely. The tearing nose that came from the box as soon as the lid shut told them the stuffed bear probably got its head ripped off.

"Good Bye, Norbert!" Hagrid sobbed as Charlie prepared to leave. "Mummy will never forget you!"

A profound sense of boneless relief enveloped the three of them as they watched Charlie vanish with a neatly cast disillusionment charm. Perhaps it was the combination of a quick (and clean) resolution to Hagrid and his dragon egg problem, the fact they wouldn't get into trouble even if Malfoy told on them, and the assurance that the stone was well guarded indeed. Whatever it was, none of them could concentrate during their remaining classes. So they decided to take a break from studying that afternoon. They stopped by the kitchens, and the House-elves prepared a large basket filled with bottles of cold pumpkin juice, sandwiches and cakes for them. As if sensing their mood, the grounds were in perfect picnic conditions: The sky was forget-me-not blue, the weather was warm and the lawns were soft with new grass.

"Peace at last," said Ron blissfully.

"We still have exams, you know," Hermione said.

"Aren't you the right ray of sunshine," said Ron. "Can't you relax? We deserve a bit of break."

They lolled about by the lake until sunset, when they reluctantly returned to the castle. Hermione had regained her concentration by then, so she bullied the boys into doing their homework for the rest of the evening. Ron typically grumbled and Harry sighed, but they did make good progress. Hermione went to bed expecting a perfectly normal day come morning, with nothing but exams to worry about.

The horrified yell from the boy's dormitories shattered that expectation: Harry had got himself kidnapped.

Final Notes : An intermission chapter turned cliff-hanger. Resolution to the Philosopher's Stone debacle in the next chapter… I think. Sherlock great-uncle Jeremy Oswald Necropolis Æthelbert Bell-Holmes and his friend Dr. Edward Littlejohn is my tip of a hat to seminal and late Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke respectively. On a completely random note, Harry's old phone once belonged to The Woman.

Neville and the Man with Two Faces

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fourteen: Neville and the Man with Two Faces

When Neville got his Hogwarts letter, he got all sorts of advice from his relatives on what to do once he got there. The most repeated among them was making good friends. His grandmother was very particular about that.

"Your friends will make or break you," she said very seriously. "So choose them wisely."

When he got there, though, Neville was rather in the frame of mind he'd like to have *a* friend. He seemed to be doing everything wrong, even when he tried his hardest not to. It was enough his fellow Gryffindors tolerated his clumsiness and didn't mind when he was around.

Harry was an odd one in that aspect.

"How come you live with your grandmother?" he asked casually in one Herbology class.

"Uh… well my mum and dad, they…" Neville floundered, refusing to look up from his pot of giggling shrub. "They, um…"

"Can't be with you?" Harry said kindly.

"Um, yeah," said Neville, very grateful for the save.

Harry nodded and moved on. He was nice like that. Even before that incident, Harry seemed to remember Neville all the time. Harry was the one who picked up his Remembrall after he dropped it at their first flying lesson, made sure he made it back to the Gryffindor Common room by curfew, and sat with him in class (he rather suspected this was the teachers' doing, but still, Harry hadn't complained). He'd invite Neville to play with the other boys, and visited him at the Hospital wing whenever he'd hurt himself (again). It was a nice feeling, knowing he wasn't forgotten. Especially considering how many people Harry was friends with and how much he valued his alone time.

The latter was something Neville observed since the beginning. Perhaps it was because he was so aware to his own loneliness and enforced solitude, but Neville noticed Harry spent a lot of time by himself. Yes, he goofed around with Ron, practiced breakdancing (some kind of Muggle dance - Neville thought it more acrobatics than actual dancing) with Dean and generally could be in the centre of all the fun, but then on the next blink he was gone, returning hours later without saying where he'd went. Ron, his best friend, just shrugged it off as an oddity of Harry's, but Neville wondered. Late at night, he'd sometimes find Harry sitting on the windowsill with his bare feet dangling outside in the cold. There was no pattern to this behaviour as far as Neville could tell-it happened whether Harry had a good day or bad day earlier - but Harry always seemed so… *sad*… when he did this, like his aunt Gertrude when the anniversary of uncle Alfred's death rolled around. Neville took to sitting next to him whenever he found Harry this way, thinking he'd at least not mind the company and hopefully find some comfort knowing he wasn't alone.

The night IT happened started like the others. Except this time, Harry spoke:

"I can't sleep sometimes."

Neville was so surprised he almost fell off. Harry grabbed his arm

before he pitched backwards.

"Sorry," said Harry, "I didn't mean to surprise you."

"It's okay," Neville breathed, trying to still his rapidly beating heart. He was rather surprised Harry had noticed him; he thought Harry was millions of miles of away.

They sat in a companionable silence at the window. Neville wondered how long Harry was going to stay there tonight. His feet were getting a very cold, despite the bunny slippers.

"Thanks, Neville," said Harry at length.

"I'm not doing anything," Neville protested.

"Yes, you are. Even Ron didn't notice I do this."

Neville looked away rather embarrassed. Then he blurted out the question that he had for a long time.

"Why do you do this?" he asked.

Harry shrugged. "Dunno. It's like bad weather. I just can't help it."

They sat in another companionable silence. Harry drew his knees to his chest and hugged his legs. Rather than staring down the tower, he was looking up.

"My birthday's on July thirty-first," he said abruptly.

"Mine's on the thirtieth," said Neville.

Harry stared at him. "Really? Wow, we almost share a birthday!" then he grinned. "Wanna come over to my place this summer? We can celebrate our birthdays together!"

Neville felt like exploding into three different directions. On the one hand he was completely stunned that Harry would even think of inviting him to his birthday and utterly delirious that he did. On the other hand he was terrified Harry would find him boring and awkward. Oblivious to Neville's turmoil, Harry went on how Mrs.

Hudson was going to bake the cake, that they could go visit Regents Park or the London Zoo or watch movies or maybe they'd go to Hamleys, he'd wanted to go there at least once.

They were both so caught up in their own happy thoughts neither of them saw the cloaked figure rise up to the window like a nightmare.

Neville let out a horrified yell when Harry was suddenly jerked out of the window. He instinctively dived after him, and, wonder of wonders, got hold of Harry's ankle. The cloaked figure - a terrifying image of coarse black cloth dripping with something silver, sticky and liquid - stunned Harry with a spell. Harry slumped like a ragdoll. Then it pointed its wand at Neville. Neville screwed his eyes shut, terrified, but he didn't let go. Then he found himself unable to move at all. Neville knew exactly what happened to him. Malfoy had done it to his legs once.

He was petrified.

When Neville was able to open his eyes again, he immediately wished he didn't because- *ohmygosh that dog can't be real there's too many heads why is it so big he's going to die ohmygosh ohmygosh…*

"Neville, calm down," said Harry's voice. "And let go, you're cutting my circulation."

Neville couldn't move. He was too terrified. Harry sighed and wrenched his ankle out of Neville's death-grip. Then he stood up and grimly studied the monstrous dog with three heads.

"He's *sleeping*," said Harry incredulously. "Hagrid wasn't lying when he said Fluffy falls asleep with a bit of music. I can see a harp over there."

Confusion and terror warred within Neville.

"W-w-what are you talking about?" he sputtered.

"Oh, yeah, you don't know," said Harry, sounding far too calm

considering the circumstances. "You remember Dumbledore's warning at the beginning of term? THAT-" he pointed at the dog. "-is one the things that are going to cause the very painful death he talked about. We need to get out of here."

They fumbled at the door. It was locked and neither of them had wands. Neville felt terror swallow him up again. They were *trapped* .

"I don't know how long we can keep Fluffy asleep, my batteries are dying," said Harry as he fished out his ever-present phone and started playing a tune with it (how?). Then he frowned. "Hey, look, there's a trapdoor."

Indeed there was. It was right underneath one of Fluffy's (why in the world did Harry call it that?) gigantic paws. They heaved the paw out of the way and wrenched the door open. It was dark beyond the small opening and the drop seemed to go straight down without any stairs or ladders.

"We can't stay here," said Harry. "My phone's not going to last more than fifteen minutes. After that we're toast. Let's go down."

"B-but!" Neville tried to protest. He couldn't even imagine what could be down there if Fluffy (seriously, why?) was only the first in a series of death traps.

"We have to take the chance," said Harry firmly. "C'mon. I'll go first."

Neville grabbed Harry's wrist in alarm. " *Don't leave me!* "

Harry jumped, taking Neville with him. They went down the drop and eventually landed on something soft with a *thump* . Neville was too terrified and disoriented to even feel relieved.

" *Ow*, good thing we have a soft landing," Harry said as he fumbled for his phone. He did something so it would shine a bright light. "I wonder what-"

They both let out a frightened squawk as they took in the large mass of sinister-looking wriggling and flailing vines that covered half of the small chamber they've entered. Small tendrils and creepers had wrapped themselves around their limbs and necks and they haven't

even *noticed* . It all retreated to the far corners as the light of Harry's phone shined.

" *That was a devil's snare* !" Neville squeaked in a high-pitched voice.

Harry goggled with his mouth hanging open.

"It was only dumb luck we're alive!" he whispered in awe. "Devil's snare likes it damp and dark-if I didn't have my phone, we'd be *dead* !"

They quickly ran towards the other end of the chamber and entered a narrow passageway. The stone walls there were dripping with water-no doubt so the Devil's snare would thrive in this horrible place-and floor slanted downwards. They eventually arrived at brilliantly lit chamber with a ceiling arching high above. Hundreds of what looked liked jewelled birds were fluttering and swirling all around the dome. On the opposite side of the chamber was a heavy wooden door. A number of brooms were leaning against the walls.

"Those aren't birds," said Harry suddenly, pointing at the enchanted flying objects. "They're *keys* ! I bet you're supposed to get the right one to open that door. See, the brooms are there so you can catch it. Nothing deadly here."

Neville let out a sigh and collapsed to his knees. The trap here wasn't deadly. They weren't going to die. He was so relieved he's mind went numb and empty. Harry joined him at the floor.

"Guess we can wait here," he said. "Reception's kind of weak, but I can still text my parents. They'll let professor Dumbledore know."

That was even a greater relief. Neville heaved and Harry did whatever it is he did to instantly contact his adoptive parents. His phone made a little chiming noise when they replied back.

"'K, now they know we've been kidnapped," Harry said. "I told them where we are. One of the professor's will come get us soon."

While they waited to get rescued, Harry told him the purpose behind the Forbidden Third Floor Corridor. Neville felt his head spinning as

Harry spoke about Nicolas Flamel, the philosopher's stone, and the thief that was after it.

"Anyway, we think Snape is-"

"P-P-Potter? L-Longbottom?"

They both looked up. Professor Quirrell was standing behind them, looking particularly absurd in his large purple turban, twitchy face and violet robes that just hug off of his thinning frame.

"Professor Quirrell!" Harry exclaimed in surprise. "Wow, you're fast!"

"M-my night for patrols," Professor Quirrell muttered, looking as if he really didn't want to think about it. "Y-y-you really have th-the most r-rotten luck, Potter."

They got up. Instead of leading them back to the wet passageway, Professor Quirrell headed towards the brooms.

"W-we can't go back," he said. "S-security forces you to go forward only."

"Oh, so it corners you to a dead-end, kinda," said Harry.

Professor Quirrell nodded. He handed over a broom to Harry and said he had to catch the large silver key with blue wings. Harry spotted the key in an instant and took off. It took Harry less than ten minutes to catch the right key. Neville whooped when Harry snatched it out of the air after doing an incredible cork-screw turn and long backwards loop. Professor Quirrell took the key and turned the lock.

The next chamber was very dark, but lights came on as they walked in. It had a huge chessboard that stretched from one side of the chamber to the other. There were two sets of chessmen carved from stone, all very tall and all neatly arranged for a game.

"Wizard's Chess?" Harry guessed, and Neville sputtered. "We have to win to go across?"

"Yes," said Professor Quirrell. "You be a Knight, Potter. Longbottom,

you'll be a Rook. I shall stand as King."

As if they understood, the black king, rook and knight removed themselves from the board. The three of them took their places, and as soon as they did so, a white pawn moved forward two paces. Professor Quirrell directed Harry and Neville and the other pieces where to move. Neville found it a bit odd how calm he sounded, but then he thought it was because Professor Quirrell was a good chess player. In six moves Quirrell called checkmate, the white King dropped crown and all the remaining pieces cleared the board. They moved on to the next chamber.

There was a very large, very disgusting mountain troll there. Thankfully it was knocked out, but the smell alone was enough to stop people in their tracks.

"But who knocked it out?" Harry wondered as they swiftly jogged passed it, holding their breaths. Professor Quirrell didn't reply and ushered them pass the next door.

Immediately purple flames sprung up and swallowed the door behind them. On the other side, black flames rose and covered the doorway leading to the next chamber. The chamber itself had nothing but a table with seven different sized bottles filled with liquid and roll of parchment. On the parchment was a riddle:

Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,

Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,

One among us seven will let you move ahead,

Another will transport the drinker back instead,

Two among our number hold only nettle wine,

Three of us are killers, waiting bidden in line.

Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,

To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:

First, however slyly the poison tries to hide

You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;

Second, different are those who stand at either end,

But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;

Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,

Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;

Fourth, the second left and the second on the right

Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

"A logic puzzle," Harry muttered, frowning. "Hey, wait…"

"Smallest bottle at the end, Potter," said Professor Quirrell. "A single drop will do."

"No, wait," said Harry, raising a hand. "The Puzzle says safety lies behind. If nothing stops you from walking across the chessboard, then you can take a broom from the key room and got back." He stared at Professor Quirrell. "What's going on?"

There was a moment's silence.

Then Neville left a cold, steady hand clutch his windpipe and a wand stab his jugular.

"Really, Potter," said Quirrell in an unfamiliar cold voice. "Don't make me hurt him."

Neville took in Harry's stunned face as his veins flooded with fear, confusion and a sense of betrayal.

" *You* ?" gasped Harry.

"Me," said Quirrell calmly over Neville's head. "For one so clever, you're very naïve and trusting."

Harry shook his head in disbelief.

"But I thought the thief was- *stupid!* " he exclaimed suddenly, " *Occam's Razor* . Why have two thieves when one is enough?"

"Yes," Quirrell laughed, and it wasn't his usual quavering treble, but cold and sharp. "Yes, and all this time you were trying to encourage me to resist the thief. You have no idea how difficult it was for me to not laugh at you, Potter, but then again who would suspect p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?"

Neville felt his jaw hanging open. He just couldn't take it all in. The Philosopher's Stone thief Harry told him about was *Quirrell* ? But Harry said he thought Snape was…

"I rather hoped you'd think Snape was after the stone," Quirrell went on, flicking his wand and conjuring ropes that tightly wrapped themselves around Harry. "He always looked the type, swooping around like an overgrown bat. But you didn't take the bait."

"He was at the first Quidditch match," said Harry, looking very brave despite the ropes that tied him. "You *weren't* ."

"Ah, of course," said Quirrell coolly. "While everyone was out there staring at you and Snape was trying to save your neck, I was in the castle trying to see what was guarding the stone. You would've done me a great favour if you died, Potter. A few more seconds you would've been hurled off and I would've found all that I needed to know."

"You let in the troll too, at Halloween," Harry went on, "The first three people who came into the girls' toilet are the ones who had the greatest interest in what happened to the troll. The three were: McGonagall, Snape and you. McGonagall and Snape were at the Quidditch match, so it has to be *you* ."

"Again, correct," said Quirrell. "I have a special gift with trolls - you've seen what I did to the one in the chamber back there? Unfortunately, while everyone else was running around trying to find it, Snape went straight for the third floor to head me off. Not only did the troll fail to beat you to death, the three-headed dog didn't

manage to properly bite Snape's leg off."

Quirrell edged towards the table, and picked up the smallest bottle.

"You're too nosey to live, Potter," Quirrell said as he uncorked it. "Scurrying around looking for the troll at Halloween, always lurking near the Forbidden Forest and keeping watch from the Gryffindor tower at night… No doubt you've seen me enter the Forbidden Forest to procure unicorn's blood. Really, you've brought this upon yourself."

Harry remained silent, but Neville knew what he was thinking. Harry's walks near the Forbidden Forest were just that: walks. Also, Neville was there when Harry sat on their dormitory's windowsill, and he was pretty sure Harry had been staring at nothing in particular during those long nights. But Quirrell would never believe them.

"Take the potion, Potter, or Longbottom dies," Quirrell said severely.

Harry glared at Quirrell defiantly. "And you'll let him go if I do?"

"Certainly."

" *No, you won't* !" Neville shouted.

Both Harry and Quirrell stared at him. Neville tried to look very brave despite the fact he was shaking all over, he could barely stand and he wanted to throw up.

"I'm going too," Neville said with a trembling voice. "I don't trust you. Where Harry goes, I'm going, too."

" *Neville!* " Harry protested.

Neville shook his head as he steeled himself.

" *No*," he said stubbornly. "Even if he lets go, I'm not going to run. So forget it."

Harry looked torn and frustrated. Quirrell rolled his eyes at the two of them.

"What a waste of time," he said. "Fine. Both of you take the potion. One drop each. Don't keep me waiting."

Neville became aware of his consciousness in stages. When he finally opened his eyes, he didn't see the dark canopy of his four-poster bed, but the familiar look of the Hospital Wing's ceiling.

"Harry," Neville whispered to the ceiling. "Please tell me I had a nightmare."

There was a pause.

"Sorry, Neville," said Harry's voice to his right.

Neville whimpered and covered his face. So the terrible images of a chalk white face with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils placed where there the back of Quirrell's head should've been swimming inside his head were… were…

"Yeah, that was Voldemort," said Harry.

Neville threw the blankets over his head and lay there trembling.

"And before you ask, yes, Voldemort was the master Quirrell was talking about and the one he was trying to steal the Stone for."

Neville let out a muted scream under the covers. How could Harry use You-Know-Who's name so casually after going through all that?

"Um, you might want to get out from under the covers, Neville. Professor Dumbledore is here."

Neville blinked. Then he cautiously peered over the edge of his blankets and look around. That was when he saw the smiling face of Albus Dumbledore.

"Good Afternoon, Neville," said Dumbledore. "You've come to only a few minutes after Harry. Excellent."

Neville stared at him. Then he remembered: "Sir, the Stone!

Quirrell-!"

"Calm down, my dear boy, all is well, as I've been telling Harry here," said Dumbledore. "You are both a little behind the times."

"Quirrell doesn't have the stone," Harry explained. "No one does. Professor Dumbledore's been telling me he had a chat with Nicolas Flamel, and they agreed to destroy it-even if it means Flamel and his wife is going to die. He hasn't told me why yet."

"And I will," said Dumbledore, sounding quite delighted. "To one as young as you two, I'm sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and Perenelle, who have lived six hundred and sixty-six years and six hundred and fifty-nine years respectively, dying is really like going to bed after a very, *very* long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure."

Harry was silent for a moment.

"If you don't mind me saying so, sir, I don't think I agree. About what you said about dying, I mean. The last time I almost died really wasn't exciting."

Dumbledore smiled sadly.

"No, I supposed not. But you know: the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all. The trouble is humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them."

Harry nodded. "Love of money is the root of all kinds of evil…"

Dumbledore beamed. "You know, Harry, I do believe this is the first time in a long time I've heard that verse quoted accurately."

Neville lay there, lost for words. Dumbledore and Harry conversed quietly with smiles on their faces.

"Sir?" Neville blurted out. "I've been thinking… Professor Quirrell kidnapped us and left us with the three-headed dog because he thought Harry was watching him, right?"

"Yes," Dumbledore confirmed. "A guilty conscious always jumps to the worst conclusions when it thinks it is caught. And Quirrell was guilty in more ways than you can imagine: killing unicorns and drinking their blood to strengthen Voldemort was bad enough, but to kill something so pure and defenceless for your selfish goals… It's no wonder those who consume unicorn's blood are cursed. You did well to contact someone the moment you were safe."

"Harry did it," Neville mumbled. "I just sat there and panicked."

"No," said Dumbledore. "You stayed with him to the very end. That was the bravest thing anyone could've done."

Dumbledore suddenly became very interested in a bird out on the windowsill, which gave Neville time to recover from his shock and embarrassment.

"Why did he go back with us?" asked Harry while Neville tried to recover his voice. "I know Quirrell got stuck at the Mirror of Erised, but why did he want me to go back with him?"

"I do believe Quirrell honestly didn't expect you two to have survived Fluffy, let alone the Devil's Snare, when the Mirror foiled him for the second time. But when he discovered that you did, he perhaps wondered if you could retrieve the Stone yourself."

"Speaking of, how did *we* get the Stone out of the mirror?" Harry asked.

"Ah, now, I'm glad you asked me that!" said Dumbledore, beaming. "It was one of my more brilliant ideas, and between you and me, that's saying something. You see, the Mirror of Erised will show you your greatest desire at the moment . Therefore, only one who wanted to *find* the stone - find it, but not use it - would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life. My brain surprises even me sometimes…"

"I almost ruined everything," said Harry, shaking his head. "I thought I'd just see myself finding the Stone when I looked into the mirror. But when I looked, I found the Stone inside my pocket. Voldemort knew immediately." Harry frowned. "But how? He couldn't've seen it.

Quirrell was wearing his turban at the time, and he didn't notice until Voldemort told him. Neville knew because he saw the me in the mirror put the stone in my pocket. Can Voldemort read minds?"

"It is one of Voldemort's many skills," said Dumbledore. "Those who are able to lie to him successfully are vanishingly few. All things considered, Harry, we must consider ourselves very lucky indeed."

Neville agreed. You-Know-Who had wanted them dead and Quirrell had been ready to kill. It was only Harry's miraculous touch that saved them. Neville shuddered as he remembered the way Quirrell's hands blistered and turned red as though he grabbed heated iron the moment he touched Harry, and how his face seem to melt off when Harry grabbed his face…

"Why couldn't Quirrell touch Harry?" asked Neville.

"His mother died to save him," said Dumbledore. "If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realise that love as powerful as his mother's for her son leave its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign… to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us protection forever. It is in Harry's very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch Harry for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good."

For another moment Dumbledore appeared to be terribly interested in the rather persistent bird at the windowsill as Harry blinked away tears and swallowed several times.

"Sir," said Harry at length, "I want to know-I have two questions…"

"Just two?"

"Yes. Snape-"

" *Professor* Snape, Harry."

"Um, yes, Professor Snape - John said he hates me because my father bullied him when they were kids. Quirrell said they hated each other. I get that. But if he hates me so much… why was he working

so hard to protect me?"

"It is true your father and Snape detested each other. Rather like you and Mr. Malfoy, in fact. But then your father did something Snape could never forgive: He saved his life."

" *What?* "

"Yes," Dumbledore said dreamily. "Funny, the way people's minds work, isn't it? Professor Snape couldn't bear being in your father's debt… I do believe he worked so hard to protect you this year because he felt that would make him and your father even. Then he could go back to hating your father's memory in peace…"

Harry scrunched his eyes like swallowing the idea was physically painful. Neville sympathized. He couldn't understand either, and trying made his head pound.

"Okay," said Harry at length. "I don't really understand, but… Well, this isn't the question I have, but Voldemort's going to try other ways to come back, isn't he? I mean, he's not gone."

"No, he is not," said Dumbledore quietly. "He is still out there somewhere, perhaps looking for another body to share… not being truly alive, he cannot be killed. He left Quirrell to die; he shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies. Nevertheless, while you two may only delayed his return to power, it will merely take someone else who is prepared to fight what seems a losing battle next time - and if he is delayed again, and again, why, he may never return to power."

Harry nodded once and then winced. " *Ow.* Well, the question I do have is… Voldemort said he only killed my mother because she tried to stop him from killing me. But why would he want to kill me in the first place?"

Dumbledore sighed very deeply this time.

"Alas, the last thing you ask me, I cannot tell you," he said. "Not today. Not now. Truth is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution. I have good reasons not to

answer, and I will not lie to avoid answering. You will know one day… put it out from your mind for now, Harry. When you are older… I know you hate to hear this… but when you are ready, you will know."

After the incredible adventure with the Stone, the remaining five weeks of classes, final exams and the end-of-year feast felt like a distant footnote to Neville. But happen they did. Neville managed to scrape through the exams, his Herbology mark making up for his abysmal Potions one. Harry, of course, did extremely well, third best of the first years after Hermione and Anthony Goldstein in that order. Thanks to Harry and Neville's heroics-Dumbledore's term; Neville was still reeling at the idea of winning *fifty house points* for bravery and outstanding show of friendship after never once winning a single house point for an entire year-Gryffindor won the House Cup, despite their loss against Ravenclaw in their last Quidditch match due to Harry being pulled out in the middle of the game (Madam Pomfrey was adamant about his one hour limit). Speaking of the House Cup, Ron and Hermione won twenty points each for outstanding show of friendship too, plus the best chess game Hogwarts had ever seen (for Ron) and use of cool logic in the face of adversary (for Hermione).

"You went after me?" said Harry when they'd came to visit at the Hospital Wing.

"There wasn't much choice," said Ron. "Percy didn't believe me when I told him you got kidnapped. We tried to tell McGonagall, but she thought you were up in the Astronomy tower or something. We tried to talk to Dumbledore, but McGonagall said he left for London. So we sneaked to the third floor after everyone went back to sleep. We used the flute you got for Christmas to get pass Fluffy. Hermione use her flame spell to get rid of the Devil's Snare-she lost her head a bit before that, though; said 'There's no wood!', *honestly* -and I directed the chess game."

"Where you heroically and stupidly sacrificed yourself to win," said Hermione, shaking her head. "I had to go alone after winning. I passed the knocked out troll and got into the potion chamber. I'd just

figured out which bottle had the potion that lets you move forward when Dumbledore entered the room. He knew everything: he just said: 'Harry is ahead, isn't he?'"

Harry and Neville stared at the two of them with stupefied faces for a long time.

"Why would McGonagall think I went up to the *Astronomy Tower?* " Harry wondered out loud.

"She said you're known to wander up to high places and sit at the edge when you're upset. Mental, I'm telling you."

Harry frowned. "Why would I go up to somewhere high up when I'm already in a high tower?"

Ron and Hermione stared at him.

"… Are you telling us you actually *do* sit at the edge of high places?"

"It's a bad habit of mine," Harry confessed. "Don't tell John, will you? She thinks I've stopped. Anyway, I was okay, I was never alone."

"Huh?" said Ron, confused, while Hermione silently exploded.

"Neville was with me," said Harry simply. "He wouldn't have let me fall."

Ron grinded both of his fists into Harry's temples and Hermione bopped him over the head for that remark. They later thanked Neville for looking after the 'stupid mental prat', as Ron put it. Neville couldn't help but smile. Harry was an odd one, definitely, but no one would've wanted him any other way.

Speaking of odd…

"Do you think Sherlock is going to be upset that we're not allowed to do magic over summer?" Ron asked on the train, referring to Harry's adoptive father.

"I suppose," said Harry. "But then he knows about Voldemort."

"He's not upset about that?" asked Hermione.

" *Upset?* " said Harry incredulously, "There's a mysterious evil dark lord who's not really alive and can't be killed out there! He probably thinks it's Christmas…"

Final Notes : you can get the proofed and expanded ebook version (ePub, Kindle, and PDF) *A Study In Magic* ! Just go my website (booksofchange dot com) and enter your email when the signup form rolls up on the front page. There are signup forms on the blog page and story page, too. Again, the URL is:

booksofchange dot com

You can Google search booksofchange and it should show up, too.

Anyway, thus ends year one. Sherlock *knows* . Voldemort doesn't know what is going to hit him. Now that Sherlock has an idea what Harry is up against, more deviations will follow…

Magic Meets the Met Again

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifteen: Magic Meets the Met Again

Through the month of June, Sally Donovan saw very little of Sherlock Holmes. That was a good thing, as it more or less translated to less internalized screaming and more peace on the streets. A brief word with the lads in Traffic confirmed he was still in town, busing around John and Harry (the younger) Watson all over London carrying a large snowy owl of all things. Considering what Sherlock Holmes was capable of on an average day, Sally was cautiously relieved he was occupied in a relatively harmless if bewildering pastime.

Actually, now that she thought about it, Sherlock Holmes was often busy with non-case matters this past year, ever since Harry (the younger) got sent to boarding school in fact. She, like many others, thought it would turn out the exact opposite. She loathed asking the boss, as he might attribute it as concern, but then the boss wondered out loud what Sherlock was up to these days after he refused to look into a gruesome murder (it turned out textbook once the gore was discounted). John Watson was closed-mouthed over the whole business and Sally wasn't brave enough to ask directly.

Sally didn't know what to make of it, therefore, when Sherlock Holmes prowled into the station with only Harry Watson (the

younger) in tow.

"Why are you here?" the boss grumbled. With a new baby in the family and a deeply hands-on case in their collective inbox, he was more prone to exhaustion induced grumpiness as of late.

Sherlock crunched his face into an ugly look, as if it caused him intense suffering to say the following words:

"I'm supposed to extend you and your family an invitation to family bowling tomorrow evening."

The look on the boss's face was *priceless* . Sally ducked her head and stifled her giggles. How did John twist Sherlock Holmes's arm into *this* ? Sally printed a document and headed over to the boss's office ostensibly to retrieve the printouts.

"Your attempts at eavesdropping are as transparent as your attempts to lose weight, Sally," said Sherlock sourly when she entered.

Sally ignored him and turned to Harry (the younger).

"Hanging in there?"

Harry smiled brightly. Sally noted his openness, and was reassured neither John nor Sherlock had mentioned the Richard Brooke Incident to him, at least hadn't named names. He also looked happy and healthy-the haunted, underfed scrawny look the kid wore like leprosy two years ago was nowhere to be found-and rather smart in his white polo-shirt and short trousers.

"And your attempts at checking Harry's well-being are frankly laughable," Sherlock snarked on.

Sally refrained from flipping him off, but it was a close thing. The boss rolled his eyes at them.

"So what have you guys been up to? Jackie said no one answered the bell when she came over to teach last week."

Sherlock froze for a second. Harry had the look of horror a child

caught in a naughty act could only manufacture.

"Harry, you said you had your lessons," said Sherlock, whirling around in flurry of woolly coat.

Harry looked down guiltily.

"You didn't leave the flat, the dust said as much. So what is this that I'm hearing?" said Sherlock, looming over.

Harry refused to look up from his guilt.

"Did you lie to me?" Sherlock demanded almost directly in his face.

Sally giggled all the way back to her desk.

To: Harry's Headmaster

From: JH Watson

Hope you're coping well with your new phone.

Fancy some bowling this Saturday? Our treat.

To: Harry's Mum

From: Albus Dumbledore

Hello John. I've learned how to text as you can see.

I'd love to! But I must warn you I've been bowling longer you have been alive.

To: Harry's Headmaster

From: JH Watson

Cool. And you're going to need it. I have youth and vitality on my side!

P.S. Bring Snape if you can

To: Harry's Mum

From: Albus Dumbledore

You've contacted him surely?

To: Harry's Headmaster

From: JH Watson

He hasn't been responding to any of my texts lately. I think he's upset.

To: Harry's Mum

From: Albus Dumbledore

Dear me. What happened?

To: Harry's Headmaster

From: JH Watson

I might have done his training in front of Harry. :)

Lestrade felt his lips twitching despite himself as he watched Sherlock roast Harry over the fire for skiving. The whole scene was bizarre, considering what he knew about the two of them. Harry looked as much like a wizard as Sherlock looked like a father-that is to say, not very. Yet here they were, Sherlock reacting like a normal father who caught his son lying and Harry presumably here to explain the whole school of magic business to him.

When his former father-in-law said Julia's magic was such that she could either choose to ignore it or harness it, Lestrade rather hoped they could just ignore it. But now that he knew what to look for-at least, knew what to expect-Julia seemed to be leaking magic everywhere. Just this past month she transformed the pink skirt with tiny flower patterns Ellen bought for her into a plain green one (Julia despised pink and flower patterns), the bouquet he gave to Julia for

finishing primary school stayed fresh despite the lack of watering and care, and most recently his car keys scuttled across the table and hid itself behind the bookshelf after his sixth consecutive day of overtime. Unfortunately, Ellen witnessed the magically animated car keys and threw a fit.

Lestrade made a quick call to John, who talked to Ellen over the phone. Whatever they said was apparently not enough, because Ellen left the flat with the boys and the baby the following morning. That was three days ago, and Ellen still hadn't come back or returned his calls. John phoned yesterday and told him Ellen had dropped off the boys at Becky's and was staying with Jacqueline. Then John assured him that Ellen was coming around. Lestrade went to bed desperately hoping it was so; he didn't want another failed marriage. As for Julia, it was clear ignoring her magic wasn't an option, so he asked Sherlock if he could have a chat with Harry. Sherlock told him they had time this afternoon, so Lestrade had planned to stop by. He didn't expect Sherlock to actually bring Harry to his office.

"John invited the headmaster of Harry's school too," said Sherlock after he was done.

Lestrade was instantly alert. "Oh, and he agreed?"

"Yes," said Sherlock. "He might bring another teacher with him, but I doubt he'll come. Jacqueline convinced your wife to join. She'll be there."

Lestrade sagged in relief.

"Okay," he sighed. To Harry he said, "Cello not your thing?"

Harry shook his head with a tiny shudder. "No."

"Did John try teaching you guitar yet?"

"Yes," said Harry eagerly. "I like it better."

Lestrade chuckled at the revolted look on Sherlock's face.

"Jackie's good at the guitar too. Actually, I don't think there's a major

instrument she *doesn't* know how to play. Let her know and she'll teach you. Just don't leave her waiting outside, okay?"

"Okay," said Harry, turning pink.

Sherlock rolled his eyes.

"So what is this case that's causing your daughter so much distress?" he asked.

Lestrade showed him the case of the missing fiancée of a society boy that left him dredging the Serpentine for her body. Sherlock quickly dismissed the jewellry and purse they'd recovered from the lake as irrelevant and deduced the hotel the fiancée was staying at with the man she was still legally married to from a receipt left inside the purse, which also served as a note from her 'kidnapper', who incidentally was the aforementioned husband. He did it all in two minutes. If he wasn't so relieved to get the case over and done with, Lestrade would've felt resentful.

"Why can't you just join the Yard and help us properly?" Lestrade complained.

"The boredom and idiocy would kill me," Sherlock said haughtily. "Do you have anything else?"

"Had my hands full with just this," Lestrade retorted. "Now if you've got nothing else to say, off out, you."

Sherlock sneered, "Gladly."

He sauntered off. Harry didn't immediately follow. He dug into his pocket and gave Lestrade a small packet.

"John told me to give this to you," said Harry. Then he scampered off after Sherlock.

Lestrade studied the packet after he left. It was made of cardboard, and decorated in gaudy blue and gold. The large label on the front said 'Chocolate Frog' in an old-fashioned script, with the words '70% fine Croakoa' in a smaller font underneath it. Inside the packet was a frog, made of chocolate presumably. Lestrade stared, bug-eyed,

when the frog *wiggled* and *moved* . He had reservations against putting an animated chocolate into his mouth, but he did anyway. He was awarded with a satisfying: *Mmmmm… chocolate* . Whilst munching the frog, Lestrade examined the collectable-looking card that came with the treat. On the front was a picture of an old man wearing half-moon glasses, had long silvery hair and beard and moustache, and a crooked nose that had to have been broken twice. Underneath the picture was the name Albus Dumbledore. He flipped the card over and read the description:

. ALBUS DUMBLEDORE .

CURRENTLY HEADMASTER OF HOGWARTS

Considered by many to be the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of Dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.

"… tenpin bowling. Right," Lestrade muttered around the chocolate. He flipped over the card again and was startled to find that Dumbledore's face had vanished. As he tried to figure out what happened, to Lestrade's greater astonishment, Dumbledore sidled back into the picture and gave him a small smile.

"Welcome to the world of magic, I guess," Lestrade said to himself.

He stashed to card into his back pocket and started shouting orders. He had a job to do.

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

Oh, come, Severus. It'll be fun!

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

No

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

What will it take to convince you?

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

Nothing

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

Not even finding out who Cecilia Shin condescended to marry?

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

Severus?

Lestrade returned home before sundown for once after he and his team found the runaway fiancée, who freaked out and bolted when she realized her husband wasn't killed in action as she was led to believe. He couldn't help but note how similar the flat looked like when Alison left him for Julia's P.E. teacher of people: all the lights were off, the air felt stale and dusty, and there was no sound beyond the muffled noise of London traffic. Julia was in her room lying on her bed, clutching her zombie bouquet to her chest and staring disconsolately at the ceiling.

"Hey, sweetheart," he whispered.

Julia directed her half-lidded gaze at him. Lestrade was again struck

at how much she looked like her mum.

"John invited us to family bowling," Lestrade said. "Ellen's going to be there."

Julia didn't react for several excruciating seconds. Then she rolled to her side and buried her face into the mattress.

"I don't want to go," she muttered.

"C'mon," Lestrade pleaded. "Jackie talked to her. John said she's coming around."

"No, she's *not*," Julia said stubbornly. "She's gonna be just like Alison."

Lestrade winced. For the umpteenth time he regretted not waiting until he met Ellen. Alison was a bad decision from the start and he was still reaping the consequences.

"Ellen will be *fine*," Lestrade said with more conviction than he felt. "She just needs time to get her head around the whole magic thing. It's not something people wonder about, yeah? Anyway, Ellen actually *listens* to Jackie. You couldn't say that for Alison."

Julia sniffed.

"You don't have to decide now. Why don't we go out for dinner tonight? Your choice."

Julia went still for a moment.

"… Fine," she grouched.

Ten minutes later Lestrade and Julia were driving around in Central London in heavy silence. As he was wont when things were miserable, anxious and depressing, Lestrade headed towards Charing Cross Road.

"I met your mother at a pub here," said Lestrade at a light.

Julia perked up, as she usually did when he mentioned her mum,

"Which one?"

"That one," he said, nodding his head at the direction of the small, grubby looking pub sandwiched between a book store and a record store. Julia pressed her nose against the side window to stare at it.

"The one that says Leaky Cauldron?"

"Yep."

Julia considered the place.

"Can we eat there?" she asked.

Lestrade was surprised. His in-laws had brought Julia up so prim and proper he thought she'd have an allergic reaction to any place related to alcohol. But then again, the same prim and proper Shin family produced Cecilia.

"Sure, why not."

They entered the pub after parking the car at a nearby lot. As always, the clientele there was interesting. There was an old bloke wearing a violet top hat, and a wild-looking woman in emerald green robes draped with cobwebs. Near the fireplace were three venerable looking crones drinking some amber-coloured liquid in tiny shot glasses and a group of withered old men were sitting around a table arguing in low voices. At the bar there was a giant-at least twice the size of an average man and five times as wide - who had long, wild tangled black hair and beard, and was nursing a pint the size of a large pitcher between his enormous hands. The bald and toothless barkeep, Tom, waved when he walked in.

"Scotch for you, Greg?" Tom said cheerfully.

"Nah, I'm here for dinner," Lestrade replied, patting Julia's shoulder as she shrunk behind his back.

"Yours?" asked Tom, looking at Julia keenly.

"Yeah," said Lestrade. "This is Julia. Say hi to Tom, sweetheart."

"Hello," Julia parroted.

Tom beamed, "Pleasure, Miss Julia."

They sat down at the bar. The Leaky Cauldron offered good old-fashioned pub grub and fancier courses, plus some unusual beverages like Pumpkin Juice and Butterbeer. Lestrade ordered bangers and mash, and Julia, who grew up eating her grandparents' food, asked for a meatless Kedgeree. She picked at it sullenly after a few bites.

"How did you and mum get married?" Julia asked suddenly.

Lestrade almost choked on his water. Julia never asked about her mum to him, preferring to go straight to her aunt and uncles for answers. She also took his marriage to Cecilia for granted like most young children; how the parents got married didn't matter except for the fact they *were* . Was Julia asking because she was interested in the romance or for some other reason? Lestrade wondered as he gathered his thoughts together.

"When I saw her at the bar here I knew I was going to marry her," Lestrade started.

This wasn't a lie, though it wasn't the whole truth: Lestrade was plastered when he staggered into the Leaky Cauldron after celebrating his birthday alone at a different pub, and in his drunken haze he decided the pretty young woman sitting there shouting abuse at her absent father was going to be his wife. After buying her a drink and chatting for fifteen minutes, they went to his tiny flat in Peckham and spent the next thirty-six hours thoroughly exploring each other's anatomy. It was *the* stupidest thing he'd ever done drunk or sober, but Julia didn't need to know that.

"I proposed within a week," Lestrade went on, which was also true, if one omitted the fact he did so mostly because he promised himself he'd never leave a woman up the duff like his father. "She said yes - but under one condition."

"What was it?" Julia asked.

Lestrade grinned. "I had to change my name."

Julia's eyes were like saucers.

"Whaaat?"

"I'm totally serious," said Lestrade, grinning. "She said she didn't want to marry someone who's last name means 'The Stranger'." Though there was no great cosmetic difference between Lestrange and Lestrade, apparently the latter meant 'the raised platform' (as if it was any better). "I agreed. We went to the Marriage Registrar's office the next day and became Mr. and Mrs. Lestrade." And immediately quarreled on how they were supposed to pronounce their new last name; he went for Lestrade like a fishing rod, and Cecilia insisted on Lestrade like a garden spade. He was just about to convert to Cecilia's way speaking when their fourteen months of marriage came to an abrupt end.

"Uncle Jeremy said mum died when I was only four months old, is it true?"

Now Lestrade felt his throat close up. Julia was too little to remember, but he could recall the fourteen days after Cecilia's death vividly. There he was, a newly minted detective sergeant on a very cold and wet October, when someone from Serious Crimes told him the news. He didn't remember what happened between that and going to the morgue to identify the body, but he remembered throwing up after seeing the mangled pulp that used to be Cecilia. The rest of the week he spent in a stupor, completely lost as to what to do. His colleagues at the station arranged the funeral, and their families took turns taking care of Julia. Detective Inspector Baynes, who was in charge of Cecilia's murder case, took him under his wing after he answered his first volley of questions like a stunted half-wit: No, he didn't have any family he could contact, as they all fell in one the three categories: unknown, dead or freshly born; no, he didn't know Cecilia's family, they'd mutually disowned each other years ago; yes, Cecilia had plenty of enemies, she tended to accrue them like lint; no, he didn't know who had the balls the murder a scary woman like her, sorry.

"Three months actually," Lestrade said. "She died at the end of

October."

"How did grandpa and grandma find us? Uncle Jason said mum vanished after she turned seventeen."

"They didn't find us. I found *them*," said Lestrade flatly.

He was forced to. Baynes told him they had to notify her parents, it was procedure, and he had nothing to lose in making contact. Lestrade disagreed; there was always the possibility he'd be called a cad and a wastrel who married a woman a good ten years younger than him, and he'd rather avoid that, thank you very much. But after a week as a single father, running ragged and completely at his wits' end, he acquiesced. The next day he miserably followed after Baynes carrying a three month old baby in his arms like some bloody teenage mother.

Mr. Shin's immediate reaction upon seeing two officers at his door step mentioning Cecilia was sighing deeply and saying: *What has she done now?* When they were told Lestrade was Cecilia's lawfully wedded husband and Julia was her daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Shin remained blatantly sceptical until they saw Julia's face. Mrs. Shin let out a shriek and gibbered: ' *That face - that's Cecilia's face!* ' and Mr. Shin said something in his native tongue with an appalled look on his face (Lestrade never found the courage to ask for a translation). Once they got over the shock and accepted the news of Cecilia's death, the Shin family took the responsibility of caring for their new family members like ducks to water. It was so amazing Lestrade forgot to retaliate when Baynes teased him about it.

"Do you miss her?" Julia asked.

Lestrade looked away. He didn't have to hedge around the truth this time, because he *did* . Dear Lord, he did. Cecilia was at once the most exasperating and mesmerizing woman he'd ever met. It was she who convinced an aging punk without any ambition that he wasn't actually hopeless. It was she who goaded the aforementioned punk into paving his way at the Met -all in fourteen months. Then she died young in the most violent way possible. Only Cecilia could live a life like a rock star without actually being one.

"… Yeah," Lestrade answered as he bit back tears. "Gawd, yeah. I wish I had more time with her."

Apparently that was all Julia needed to hear, because she was cheerful for the rest of the evening. And when he asked her again about bowling, she said more than happy to say yes.

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

I hope you're well. I'm writing because I saw someone unexpected at the Leaky Cauldron last night.

Remember Cecilia? Crazy girl. Thought the International Statute of Secrecy was a failure waiting to happen, so we ought to scrape it quick. Opposed You-Know-Who only because he was scraping the Statute of Secrecy the wrong *way.*

I think I saw her husband and daughter. The husband was dressed like a Muggle and talked like one, but Tom says he's been going to the Leaky Cauldron for the last twelve years. His name is Greg. The daughter's name is Julia. I can't spell their last name, but it sounds like Les-trod. The girl was around ten or eleven, and looks like her mum. Is she a witch?

Hagrid

Dear Hagrid,

I'm doing very well, thank you.

As a matter of fact Miss Julia Lestrade is *a witch, and if all goes well, she will start Hogwarts this year.*

How would you describe Mr. Lestrade?

Albus Dumbledore

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

It's hard to say exactly. He seemed a decent bloke to me. But he also said he knew he was going to marry Cecilia the moment he saw her, so I think he's a bit reckless too.

Hagrid

Lestrade was very sure there was only a derelict building at the address John forwarded, certainly not a bowling alley, but John, Sherlock and Harry were waiting for him and Julia when they came. John gestured them to come closer. All five of them stood huddled around the boarded up door. When a crowd of tourist passed by, John gripped his arm, gave him a look and pulled him sideways. Instead of hitting rotting wood, they passed right through.

Lestrade clenched his teeth to stop himself from swearing a blue streak. They were in brightly lit chamber that had fifty polished wooden lanes. Sets of bowling pins on the end of each lane, and they were rearrange themselves on their own after getting knocked over. Instead of a rack, bowling balls just dripped out of a large glass tube hanging down from the ceiling. There was an impossibly long blackboard above the striking areas, and an invisible hand seemed to be writing all matter of advertisements with multicoloured ink. To top it off, the speakers above were announcing the next song was, *From the Weird Sisters: Dance like a Hippogriff* !

"Is this what you two been up to? Invading the wizard world?" he shouted at John and Sherlock.

"Of course," drawled Sherlock.

"Pretty much," confirmed John.

Lestrade wanted to box their ears.

Ellen and Jacqueline came shortly afterwards. Ellen ran to him and flooded his chest with tears and apologies before sweeping Julia in her embrace.

"I'm so sorry!" Ellen wailed as she held them both tightly. "That was so wretched of me!"

Lestrade mumbled it was fine, he'd reacted the same way when the penny dropped on him, so let's just move on, okay? Sherlock rolled his eyes at them. Lestrade told Sherlock he hoped someone would get violently sick over his poncy coat. That was when the Headmaster of Harry's school appeared and Lestrade and Ellen were driven speechless.

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore looked exactly like his picture on the Chocolate Frog Card. He was also tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt, and tied back with a blue bow in deference to the vigorous physical activity they were about to engage in. He was wearing long scarlet robes with elabourate golden patterns, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles perched on top of his long crooked nose.

Christ, you can't look more wizard than this, Lestrade thought dazedly.

"Good evening ladies and gentleman!" said Dumbledore, positively bursting with energy and excitement. "It's so good to see all of you! You have no idea how encouraging it is to me to see so many people willing to engage in the fine sport of tenpin bowling."

"Is Snape coming?" John asked. Lestrade noticed Harry looked sickened.

"Alas, no," said Dumbledore regretfully. "He appears to have gone into hiding. I've tried to locate him for the last twenty-four hours to no avail."

John went around and introduced people to Dumbledore. Lestrade covered himself in shame by asking if wizards seriously had dragons before he even said his name. Dumbledore answered: yes, there were dragons in Magical Britain- common Welsh Green and Hebridean Blacks- and very nice to meet you Greg, by the way.

"How do you know my name?" asked Lestrade, wondering if the man was mind-reader.

"Do you recall a very large man at the Leaky Cauldron last night?"

Lestrade nodded dumbly.

"That was the Hogwarts' gamekeeper, Rubeus Hagrid," said Dumbledore. "He overheard your name."

Ellen fared better than Greg-she said her name at least. Julia hid behind Ellen when Dumbledore turned his attention to her.

"How do you do, Miss Julia?" said Dumbledore kindly, crouching down so they could see each other eye-to-eye.

Julia stared at the venerable old wizard. "Daddy showed me your card," she blurted out.

"My chocolate frog card?"

Julia nodded. The corners of Dumbledore's eyes crinkled.

"Between you and me," he said, "I believe my greatest accomplishment is having a chocolate frog card of my own."

John introduced Jacqueline the last. Jackie was the most graceful among them. Perhaps it helped she'd known Dumbledore's name for a long time because of Cecilia.

"I do believe your name was down in our admissions books," Dumbledore remarked.

"I did get an acceptance letter," said Jacqueline. "But my Dad thought Hogwarts wouldn't suit me, so I didn't go."

"Mmmm," said Dumbledore thoughtfully. "Your father is Shin June Hu, correct?"

"Yes, sir. Do you know him?"

Dumbledore smiled a bit ruefully. "We have corresponded a great

deal when your brothers and sister attended Hogwarts."

They started bowling afterwards, two teams of four, losing team buying the first round of drinks and snacks. Wizard bowling was just like normal bowling except the pins were alive, and not only did they return to their assigned spots after each turn, but jeered at you if you didn't hit them. The only people who could actually bowl were Dumbledore and John. Dumbledore bowled like a pro, and John was a beast all around. Sherlock paid no attention to the game and interrogated Dumbledore whenever he took a break. Dumbledore blithely deflected his questions whilst texting and taking pictures with his phone (so wizards used technology too?). Lestrade told Sherlock if he couldn't behave then he could go sit in a corner.

"Shut up, Lestrade, you don't understand," Sherlock snapped.

Lestrade glowered at Sherlock. Then he looked at his wife. They gave each other a wordless nod. If Sherlock was going to be a tit, so will they.

Lestrade first checked the kids. They were a good distance away, and Jacqueline was showing them a magical pen that could transform into a lightsaber. Assured the kids were thoroughly occupied, Lestrade wrapped an arm around Ellen's shoulders. Ellen cuddled in.

"Oi, John, c'mere!" he hollered.

John came over. Lestrade took a hand, rubbed his thumb over the back, and put on his most cocky grin.

"Ellen and I were thinking of starting a torrid three-way love affair. Wanna join us?"

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

Well, Headmaster? What is your verdict?

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

It cannot be as shallow as I think it is.

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

Shallow? What do you mean?

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

[See Attachment]

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

There is no reason to believe it WASN'T shallow.

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

I stand corrected. Mr. G. Lestrade is a man worthy of Cecilia.

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

What? What did he do?

To: S. Snape

From: A. Dumbledore

[See Attachment]

To: A. Dumbledore

From: S. Snape

…

Final Note : The wizards are learning how to text. Everyone fancies Lestrade ;) I made a lot or progress on the Thesis, so I treated myself with some recreational writing. I wrote everything in less than three days and it was so much fun. The pen that turns into a lightsaber was inspired by ThePianoGuys from YouTube (check out their Star Wars parody video!).

Introduction to Magic 101

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixteen: Introduction to Magic 101

In Harry's opinion, 'family bowling' was one of the most bizarre things he'd experienced this summer, and some very usual things had happened so far. Watching Albus Dumbledore play tenpin bowling was surreal enough, but John's casual and blithe attitude towards it, plus witnessing Mr. Lestrade, who in Harry's mind was the suited and perpetually exasperated detective inspector Sherlock was secretly fond of, in jeans and a t-shirt with his family at a wizard bowling alley was just two steps away from absurd. That Miss Jackie, the church music director, came from a long line of witches and wizards and was related to Mr. Lestrade by marriage, whose daughter was also a witch, barely registered after the first two. But then to Harry Miss Jackie was a familiar if distant fixture like the organ she played in chapel. Harry wasn't sure if he'd be that much more surprised if someone told him Miss Jackie was a Jedi.

Dumbledore won the first game by a tiny margin. John would have won if Mr. and Mrs. Lestrade didn't trigger Sherlock into throwing a violent tantrum and needed to be restrained. Harry, who'd been distracted by Miss Jackie's lightsaber-transforming pen, asked John what they did. John refused to answer and scowled at Mr. Lestrade instead. As peace offering, Mr. Lestrade offered to buy the drinks and followed John and Harry to the food stand.

"So what got his knickers in a twist?" Mr. Lestrade asked, referring to Sherlock.

John sighed. "All of a sudden magic isn't okay anymore."

"Why, what happened?"

John told him about the Mirror of Erised. Mr. Lestrade said the mirror sounded precisely like the sort of thing that would exist if Magic were real (which it was). John agreed.

"But that's the thing," said John. "If magic can touch something like desire, what else can it do? Where does it stop?" A pause, "It reminds me of the Baskerville case. Sherlock freaked out when he doubted his own senses. He eventually figured out it was mind-altering gas, and that's rational enough for an explanation, but *this* ? You could say this was done magically for pretty much anything-makes you intellectually lazy."

"I see what you mean," said Mr. Lestrade thoughtfully. "Can't ignore magic now that he knows it's real, but he can't incorporate it fully into his deductions since he doesn't know the limitations."

"It's not as if he can directly perceive it, being a Muggle and all," John agreed.

"Muggle?"

"Non-magic people," John explained. "People like us."

Mr. Lestrade frowned. "Isn't sliding through a solid door performing magic?"

"That's just *using* magic," John clarified. "It's kind of like opening a door: I didn't make the door and I didn't install the door, but that doesn't stop me from opening the door. Of course, I wouldn't have known there was a door if a wizard didn't tell me. We Muggles can't perceive magic unless it's spelled that way."

Mr. Lestrade and John carried back their orders: two trays full of tankards of Butterbeer, chips and savoury pasties.

"Can't he just ignore it? It's not as if he couldn't solve crimes before he knew magic is real," said Mr. Lestrade.

"I don't think he can bring himself to," John replied. "Remember the Giant Rat of Sumatra? Ravi turned the killer into a rat because he felt threatened, and that was just by *accident* . Can you imagine what it would look like if a witch or a wizard did something deliberately? Magic people keep themselves hidden from us non-magicals for the most part, but they're not completely removed from our society. Besides, Harry-"

John visibly stopped. Mr. Lestrade shrewdly noted John's obvious shift of gears and avoidance of eye contact whilst settling the trays.

"I mean, Harry's a *wizard*," John finished.

"You know, I'd really appreciate it if I knew what to expect before my daughter goes facing the magical equivalent of terror gas like the Baskerville HOUND," Mr. Lestrade deadpanned.

"Sorry," said John apologetically. "I don't mean to hide it. There's just too much to explain. It's like trying to write down the answer to the question: 'describe the Holocaust' for an exam and it only gives you this much space." John's thumb and forefinger parted an inch from each other. "Pop over to Baker Street if you want to have a brief introduction to contemporary wizard history. I'll make popcorn."

Mr. Lestrade huffed. "Fine. Speaking of magic, what convinced Ellen magic is okay?"

"Well-"

"Oh that is brilliant, that is *gorgeous!* " shouted Sherlock.

The three of them looked up. Sherlock was twirling around and waving hands in jubilance like he was told there were multiple serial killers collaborating together and on the prowl. Mrs. Lestrade, who looked quite alarmed, was hiding her witch step-daughter behind her back. Dumbledore and Miss Jackie looked bemused.

"What's up with you?" Mr. Lestrade asked.

Sherlock ignored him. "John! John, it makes sense now!" he crowed, grabbing John by the biceps and twirling them both around in a weird waltz before he turned to Miss Jackie. "Jacqueline, say it again!"

Miss Jackie blinked slowly a couple of beats.

"I told Sherlock," she said, enunciating each word, "That magic can only touch things that are *real* . Matter is real, so magic can alter that. Space is real, so magic can stretch that. Desire is real-that's why mirrors that show the deepest desire of a human heart can exist. Conversely, and perhaps more accurately, one could say that if magic can touch something in some manner then it is evidence that the something is real."

"Okay, so now you know magic only affects real things. Good for you," said John. "Why is that comforting?"

"Don't you see it?" said Sherlock. "Take Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration and its five exceptions."

John endeavoured to look interested.

"One of the five exceptions is food," Sherlock continued, joining his palms under his chin. "Food cannot be produced out of thin air. You can move it, change it, copy it, multiply it, but you can't make it out of nothing."

John's eyes grew abstracted. "I really don't…"

"Here is the rub," Sherlock interrupted. " *Things that are real cannot internally contradict itself* . You can *give* memory a form by means of a medium, but you can't turn memory blue since memory by definition doesn't have a form. You can conjure a life form, at least something that imitates a life form, but you can't kill it at the same time."

John smiled feebly. "Ordinary mortals like me need all the steps spelled out, Sherlock, and you're skipping some of them. So what is the connection?"

"I was getting to that," said Sherlock. "You should know that with the

exception of salt, water and other such inorganic minerals, food is mostly comprised of things that were once alive, but at the end are dead."

Comprehension dawned on John's face. " *Oooh*… !"

"So in order to produce food out of a vacuum, you must conjure things that are at once alive *and* dead."

"And things *can't* be alive and dead at the same time in the same sense," said John thoughtfully. "Talk away, Sherlock. I just love it. It's fine!"

Sherlock smiled. He was always warmed by genuine admiration. "Now do you see what troubled me?"

"You were worried magic could bypass the law of non-contradiction," said John, nodding. "Magic being able to transform things didn't bother you. You can figure out if something was transformed based on the traces left behind. Magic adding impossible features to objects didn't bother you either, since you can observe what those features are and that's the important part."

"Mind-altering spells and memory removing enchantments are troubling, but the threat is similar to barbiturates," Sherlock continued. "But if *logic* can be bypassed…"

"… Then it's not just your Work that collapses-the entire scientific enterprise become moot," John finished.

There was a short moment of silence. Sherlock wriggled in his spot looking very pleased with himself, and John smiled at him fondly. Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled like mad, and Mr. and Mrs. Lestrade still looked confused. Harry couldn't read Miss Jackie or Julia's expressions-they had the same mild look that could be anything from bemusement to amusement.

"Can we take down the Voldemort wall paper down now?" asked John at length.

On the lane next to them, a warlock who was on the verge of rolling his ball went white and forgot to release his grip. Both him and his

ball skid across the lane and smashed into the pins.

"Nonsense, that research isn't over," said Sherlock.

"What research?" Mr. Lestrade asked. "And who is this Voldemort?"

A young witch carrying a silver tray gasped and crumpled to the floor, scattering tankards and spilling mead everywhere. Elsewhere someone let out a shriek a pitch bellow ultrasonic levels.

"… Perhaps we should talk elsewhere?" said Mr. Lestrade.

They moved to the lounge area. The adults discussed the history of Voldemort in hushed voices. Harry tuned out. He'd been bombarded with nothing but Voldemort this past month and it was very tiring to hear about him again. Instead Harry let his mind wander to the setbacks they'd experienced this past month trying to gather data.

The first problem was the *lack* of available data. There were plenty of books and memoirs that wrote about the time Voldemort was at the height of his powers, but there was precious little written on what he could do. Sherlock was disgusted at the rampant speculation on Voldemort's supposed abilities, like killing people at glance and sucking out a person's soul ("they're confusing him from a Basilisk and a Dementor!"). As for books that speculated Voldemort's origins, John dismissed them as tripe ("They're as badly researched as Dan Brown's historical fictions."). In the end they gave up on the books and wrote letters to people they knew who lived through the era: Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Hagrid, Dumbledore and… *Snape* . Then they encountered their second setback: though Hedwig could deliver letters to the intended recipient without fail-Hermione confirmed this-their responses never reached back.

Sherlock was determined to find out how this was happening and why, which meant John and Harry had to traipse all over London carrying a large snowy owl in a cage, to the bewilderment of Muggle Londoners. Eventually Sherlock figured out someone was intercepting all incoming owl post addressed to *Harry Potter* at 221B Baker Street. They first tried to fool the interceptor by asking people

to address their mail to H. Watson at 221 Baker Street, but the interceptor immediately cottoned on and started stealing all owl post addressed to and from Baker Street. Finally, after Sherlock concluded the interceptor was someone from the Magic world, therefore on the balance of probability ignorant of Muggle technology, he sent activated mobile phones to those who didn't have one already from the Leaky Cauldron. Mr. Weasley, Ron's Dad, was the most enthusiastic, though not necessarily the most competent. He always got overexcited whenever he dialled, and had a tendency to incinerate the phone whilst trying to add charms to the device. Snape refused to communicate after Harry watched John teaching him how to do clinchers, and Hagrid's fingers were too big to properly manipulate the keypads. Dumbledore was the only person who could learn to operate a phone and had a wealth of information on Voldemort he was willing to share, but it took a month to get to that point. Not because Dumbledore had trouble figuring things out, but because he was *busy* .

"I'm afraid my time is not my own," Dumbledore said when he managed to call back. "The school board expects me to pull a miracle in regards to the school budget and the Wizengamot harbours the delusion I am omniscient, which we all know cannot be true. I can recommend books, of course, but they tend not to be very helpful as you noticed."

"Can you recommend someone who can fix our problem with owl post?" asked John.

"I shall speak to Hagrid," Dumbledore promised. "Barring that, I should have some time the following Saturday evening. Until then, please keep your eyes and ears open for anything unusual. The incident smacks of an agent possessing considerable amount of magic ability."

Sherlock installed secret cameras all around the flat so they could hopefully catch the interceptor in the act. It was a good thing he did, because the Tuesday evening after the call from Dumbledore, Harry almost *sat* on the culprit.

Every Tuesday evening John had small group with the ladies from their church. Usually, John departed from 221B for these meetings,

but for the first time ever John had offered to host. Sherlock vetoed, saying that he needed access to their kitchen lab. John told him he was more than welcome to stay in the flat as long as he didn't enter the living room. Sherlock refused with extreme prejudice. Apparently Mr. Lestrade warned him the ladies of the small group spoke all manner of TMI, Sherlock's ginger chest and armpit hair being the tamest example.

"Why would you even mention my chest hair?" demanded Sherlock, looking quite mortified.

John shrugged helplessly. "I felt obligated to say *something* after Becky shared how her husband farts in his sleep, Joanna's fiancé refuses to seek treatment for his athlete's feet, and Ellen said the first night on their honeymoon, Greg-"

"DELETED!" shouted Sherlock, every line of his body cringing. "I'm deleting this immediately!"

Sherlock fled the flat when Tuesday evening came. Harry said hello to Mrs. Lestrade and Miss Jackie (a small turn out; apparently the other ladies were scared of seeing Sherlock in his natural habitat) before returning to his room and collapsing on his bed.

The trouble was there was already someone sitting on it.

Harry managed not to yell, but it was close thing. The little creature on his bed had large, bat-like ears and bulging green tennis-ball shaped eyes. Harry knew instantly the creature was a house-elf, though unlike the house-elves at Hogwarts, this elf was wearing what looked like an old pillowcase with rips for arm-and-leg holes. Harry and the house-elf stared at each other for a long time, neither knowing what to say.

"Hello," said Harry, after he decided he'd stared rudely long enough.

The elf slipped off of his bed and bowed so low the tip of his long, pencil shaped nose touched the ground.

"Harry Potter," said the house-elf in the high-pitched voice when he raised his head. "Long has Dobby wanted to see you, sir… such an

honour it is…"

"Uh, thank you," said Harry nervously. He had a distinct feeling the only person allowed to know the existence of house-elves was John, and even that was iffy. "Is there a particular reason why you're here?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Dobby earnestly. "Dobby has come to tell you, sir… it is difficult, sir. Dobby wonders where to begin…"

"Take a seat," said Harry, gesturing his spare chair.

To his horror, the elf burst into tears-very noisy tears.

" *Take a seat!* " he wailed. " *Never… never ever…* "

"I'm sorry," Harry whispered, hoping against hope the Muggle guests downstairs couldn't hear them. "I didn't mean to offend you or anything-"

"Offend Dobby!" choked the elf. "Dobby has *never* been asked to sit down by a wizard-like an *equal* -"

Harry ushered the elf to the chair, wondering if there was a polite way to clamp his hand over the elf's mouth. The elf sat there hiccoughing, looking like a large and very ugly doll. When he finally managed to control himself, his great eyes fixed on Harry in an expression of watery adoration.

"I'm guessing you don't know a lot of decent wizards," said Harry, trying to move on and cheer up the elf.

Dobby shook his head. Then he launched himself to window and started beating his head against a still, squealing. " *Bad,* Dobby! *Bad,* Dobby!"

"What are you doing?" hissed Harry, alarmed, pulling the elf away.

"Dobby had to punish himself, sir," said Dobby, who had gone cross-eyed. "Dobby almost spoke ill of his family…"

"Your family?"

"The wizard family Dobby serves, sir. Dobby is a house-elf-bound to serve one house and one family forever…"

"Do they know you're here?"

"Oh, no, sir, no," said Dobby after a shudder. "Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for seeing you, sir. Dobby will have to shut his ears on the oven door for this. If they ever knew, sir-"

"Won't they notice when you shut your ears on the oven door?"

"Dobby doubts it, sir. Dobby is always having to punish himself for something, sir. They lets Dobby get on with it, sir. Sometimes they reminds me to do extra punishments…"

Harry stared. The contrast between Dobby and the happy house-elves at Hogwarts couldn't be starker.

"Can't you leave? Escape?" Harry asked.

"A house-elf has to be set freed, sir. And the family will never set Dobby free. Dobby will serve the family until he dies…"

Harry stared again.

"That's not right. How are house-elves set free? Can the Ministry of Magic force your family to let you go? Is there any way I can help?"

Harry immediately wished he didn't say anything because Dobby dissolved into wails of gratitude. Hedwig, who had been sleeping in her cage, woke up with a screech and started beating her wings against the bars of her cage.

"Please," Harry whispered frantically. "Please be quiet. We have Muggle guests today. If they know you're here…"

"Harry Potter asks if he can help Dobby," Dobby warbled. "Dobby has heard of your greatness, sir, but of your goodness Dobby never knew…"

Harry felt himself go hot in the face. "Whatever you've heard about my greatness is a load of rubbish. I'm not even first in my year.

That's Hermione."

"Harry Potter is humble and modest," said Dobby reverently. "Harry Potter does not speak of his triumph over He-Who-Must-Not-be-Named…"

"Voldemort?"

Dobby clapped his hands over his ears and moaned, "Speak not the name, sir! Speak not the name…"

"Sorry," said Harry. "I know a lot of people who don't like it. Ron and Hagrid-all of my wizard-raised friends- they, uh, pretty much react like you."

Dobby leaned towards Harry, his orb-like eyes aglow.

"Dobby heard tell," he said, "that Harry Potter met the Dark Lord again for a second time, just weeks ago… and *Harry Potter escaped yet again!* "

"By sheer dumb luck," Harry muttered. He winced as he remembered the scathing critique Sherlock delivered for what he did at the chamber where the Mirror of Erised was hidden. He would've gone on at greater length except John put him in a clincher and kneed him hard in the mid-drift. Despite what he said, Dobby's eyes shone with tears.

"Ah, sir," said Dobby, dabbing his face on his grubby pillow case. "Harry Potter is bold and valiant! He has braved so many dangers already! But Dobby has come to protect Harry Potter; to warn him even if Dobby *does* have to shut his ears in the oven door… *Harry Potter must not go to Hogwarts* ."

There was a silence that was only broken by the soft laughter of the guests and the distant rumble of John's voice.

"But why?" Harry stammered. "Why must I not go to Hogwarts?"

"There is a plot, Harry Potter. A plot to make the most terrible things happen in Hogwarts School of witchcraft and wizardry this year," Dobby whispered, trembling all over. "Dobby has known it for

months, sir. Harry Potter must not put himself in peril. He is too great, too good, to lose. He is too important, sir!"

"No, I'm not. And what terrible things? Who's plotting them?"

Dobby made a funny choking noise and started banging his head against a wall. Harry grabbed his arm to stop him.

"Okay, fine!" cried Harry. "You can't tell me. I understand. Is the reason why you can't tell me the same reason why you can't just leave your family? You can just shake or nod."

Dobby nodded slowly.

"A house-elf must always- *always* -keep the family secrets, sir."

He gave Harry a wide-eyed look, like he was giving a hint. Harry didn't get it, but he mentally filed it.

"Okay," said Harry, "Now about this trouble, why are you warning me? Does it have anything to do with Vol- I mean, You-Know-Who?"

Dobby shook his head this time. "Not-not *He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*, sir."

He had the same wide-eyed look on his face, like this was another hint. Harry was still completely lost.

"Well, I can't think of someone else who can to make horrible things happen in Hogwarts," said Harry. "Whoever it is has *Dumbledore* to contend with. As for me not returning to Hogwarts, even if I decide not to go back this coming September, I need to give a reason. I'd have to tell Dumbledore and my Muggle Parents: ' *a House-elf named Dobby said a terrible danger is going to happen this year at Hogwarts* .'"

Dobby's eyes bulged and paled when Harry reached the logical conclusion. It would've been funny if the elf didn't look so pathetic clutching his filthy pillowcase.

"I need to warn my friends too," Harry went on. "I can't let them face the danger alone without warning."

"Friends who don't even *write* to Harry Potter?" asked Dobby slyly.

"Well, I've been having trouble with Owl Post, I'm sure they- wait a minute," Harry frowned. "How do *you* know I haven't got any letters from my friends?"

Dobby shuffled his feet.

"Harry Potter mustn't be angry at Dobby. Dobby did it for the best-"

" *Have you been stopping my letters* ?!"

"Dobby has them here, sir."

The elf pulled out a thick wad of envelopes from the insides of the pillowcase he was wearing. Harry could make out Hermione's neat handwriting, Ron's untidy scrawl, and even a scribble that looked like it was from Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper. Dobby blinked anxiously up at Harry.

"Harry Potter mustn't be angry… Dobby hoped… if Harry Potter thought his friends had forgotten him… Harry Potter might not want to go back to school, sir…"

Harry stared at the ceiling and breathed deeply through his nose, like he was supposed to whenever he was about to explode in rage. It was almost instinctive now, after two years of practice.

"Well you hoped wrong," Harry snapped at the ceiling. "I have to go back. Nothing you say is going to change that. Now give me back my letters. Please."

The elf let out a sad little sigh.

"Then Dobby has only one choice."

Before Harry could move, Dobby darted to the bedroom door, pulled it open and sprinted down the stairs. Heart in his mouth, stomach lurching, Harry sprang after him. Harry felt as if his stomach disappeared when he reached the kitchen.

All the test tubes and glassware in the kitchen were hovering near

the ceiling. On top of the fridge crouched Dobby.

"No," croaked Harry, "Sherlock will kill me…"

"Harry Potter must say he won't go to Hogwarts…"

"Dobby, *please*…"

"Say it, sir-"

"I can't-"

Dobby gave him a tragic look.

"Then Dobby must do it, sir, for Harry Potter's own good."

The glassware dropped to the floor with a heart-stopping crash. Shards of glass scattered everywhere and liquid chemicals splattered the floors and walls. Screams filled the living room. The kitchen slide-doors flew open. John stood frozen at the doorway, and all the ladies of the small group were staring at the carnage.

Harry worked on his jaw, dry mouthed.

"… It wasn't me," he pleaded, very lamely.

The unamused look John nailed Harry with was so weighty and pointed he felt an urge to make a false confession if it let him to get away from it.

"Uummm, isn't it impossible for someone to drop so many test tubes all at once?" said Mrs. Lestrade.

John gave her a short side-glance. The unamused look remained.

"Take a photo for evidence and let Sherlock judge," Miss Jackie suggested.

"No need," John growled before barking out orders. " *Clean up* ."

Mrs. Lestrade helped Harry scrub off the chemicals and Miss Jackie hoovered the shards. The evening would've more or less returned to normal except a huge barn owl crashed into the window by the time

small group ended and John asked Mrs. Lestrade and Miss Jackie to stay behind a bit longer. It staggered midair before righting itself, then perched on the iron bars outside the sitting room window and kept tapping until John let it in. The owl swooped in, dropped a letter on the table and flew out. John read the letter.

Then let out a fine flow of angry army personnel speak so profane even Miss Jackie, who didn't express emotion very often, looked visibly full of horrified fascination.

"I actually understood some of that…" she said.

John marched to the communal laptop and played the recordings from the security cameras installed inside the kitchen. At the right time frame, the feed showed the hovering glassware and Dobby very clearly. Harry wondered, for a brief moment, what would happen if they posted the video on YouTube.

"Right," John growled. "This definitely wasn't the way I wanted to break the news, but I can't think of another way. Ellen, you saw that right?"

Mrs. Lestrade nodded. It was remarkable how she looked like a wounded gazelle on the Serengeti stalked by a pack of ravenous hyenas, when normally she was the kind of person who sent photos of naked buttocks to the tabloid papers when they insulted her husband.

"That, for the lack of better term, was magic," John declared. "Now hang on a bit before you blow up. I can explain. Jackie, help me out here."

"Oh, I don't know," Miss Jackie demurred. "The magic we're talking about isn't sleight of hand. It's not Wiccan practices that tap into spirits and elemental powers either, though Wiccans may claim relation. It's hard to explain what Magic is exactly, but I call it the power over things unseen but nevertheless real."

Mrs. Lestrade looked completely lost. John sighed.

"Less philosophy and more practical demonstrations, please."

John ended up showing Mrs. Lestrade old editions of the *Daily Prophet* and Harry's textbooks to show what magic was like on a day-to-day basis. Harry wondered why it was all so necessary until Miss Jackie mentioned she was the thirty-fifth generation witch from her father's side, and the hundred and twenty-fourth generation witch from her mother's side. This persistent strain of magic meant Julia Lestrade, Mrs. Lestrade's stepdaughter and Miss Jackie's niece, was very likely a witch too.

John stared. "A hundred twenty-four generations? Seriously?"

"As old as my native country's history, dating back to the Old Three Kingdoms period," said Miss Jackie. "It's nothing to write home about. You can find longer lines in India and the middle-east."

John continued to stare. "I'm more surprised that you guys kept track."

"Genealogy is very important," said Miss Jackie cryptically.

John then asked Mrs. Lestrade if she noticed strange things happening when Julia was upset. Mrs. Lestrade rambled how all the electronics exploded or just plain died when Mr. Lestrade had to cancel an eagerly anticipated father-daughter date because a madman was terrorizing London by decking his hostages with SEMTEX, and the one time Mr. Lestrade went down with a dangerously high fever, Mrs. Lestrade swore she saw *snow* falling locally at his sickbed.

"I noticed magic manifests according to the way a kid feels," John remarked. "Harry used to teleport himself up a tree or ledge whenever he got upset. He also blew up Marjorie Dursley-she inflated like a balloon and floated up to the ceiling-and she was going on about how 'if something is wrong with the bitch there's something wrong with the pup' to Harry's face. It was kind of awesome."

"Don't say that," Miss Jackie chided. "Anyway, in a few more weeks someone from the British magic community is going to contact you and Greg. They're going to offer Julia an opportunity to go study magic at a boarding school. If she consents, she'll go and receive

one of the finest magic educations available in the world-but she'll have to leave *our* world it until she's done."

Mrs. Lestrade was startled. "She won't come back?"

"She'll come home for the holidays, but for the majority of the time, she'll be away."

Mrs. Lestrade let out a silent 'oh'.

"… Greg's not going to like that," said Mrs. Lestrade. "Like, at *all* . They don't get to spend a lot of time as it is."

"I know. It's tough, like any other boarding school can be," said Miss Jackie kindly. "But you may not have other options-not good ones, at any rate. Julia is magical enough that training makes sense. If I were to rate my magic ability in terms of investments, I'm a little better than an average savings account. Cecilia was like having a half million pounds for investment capital and Warren Buffet as your advisor; twenty to thirty percent gains on average."

"And Julia?" asked John.

Miss Jackie fingered her chin. "A good index fund plus some stock options; won't beat the market unless the individual stocks do extremely well, but will never underperform the market either."

Mrs. Lestrade clutched her forehead, like all this talk about investments and magic was causing her pain.

"It isn't some kind of secret government program, is it?" she asked.

"The non-magical governments don't know magic exists, and it is best to keep it that way," said Miss Jackie, looking very serious. "Government-sanctioned witch hunts are *contemporary history* . The Western European and American magical communities were *lucky* . Their witch-hunts happened before the sixteenth century, so non-magical people weren't equipped to properly hunt down witches and wizards, as we sometimes call ourselves. They had plenty of time to perfect the art of hiding. They even set up the International Confederation of Wizards to ease the way, but it only encompassed countries associated with Western Europe. The other magic

communities were slow to adapt separation-having magic people living alongside non-magical people is still part of the culture in some places-so the modernization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century caught them off guard. The Chinese magical community was *decimated* when Mao Zedong carried out the Cultural Revolution, the Khmer Rouge systemically executed all the Cambodian magicals that didn't manage to get away, and the magic communities in the former states of Soviet Union no longer exist. Joseph Stalin made sure of that."

Harry felt a bit shaken when Miss Jackie finished speaking. He hadn't learned any of this in his History of Magic classes. Professor Binns preferred to drone on about goblin rebellions and ancient sorcerers, and that never struck him as relevant as the facts Miss Jackie was telling them.

"So it's a separate society all together," said Mrs. Lestrade, looking just as shaken as Harry.

"We keep ourselves hidden as much as possible," replied Miss Jackie.

There a moment of silence. At length Mrs. Lestrade sighed.

"This is too much," she said. "I'm sorry, but this is too much. I mean, *magic*, seriously." She shook her head. "Why couldn't they just ignore it like you, Jackie? What's wrong with living normally?"

"I was only able to ignore it because I never had enough of it to truly matter," said Miss Jackie. "And there's nothing particularly wrong or right about living *normally*, whatever that is. It's how people inevitably react when they see something unfamiliar and uncomfortable and potentially more powerful than you."

Mrs. Lestrade grimaced at that.

"… Okay," said Mrs. Lestrade. "I'm not afraid of you, by the way. I never could be."

Miss Jackie smiled. It looked sad, but also very, very grateful. "Thank you."

Mrs. Lestrade left the flat shortly afterwards. Miss Jackie lingered a bit longer to help sort out the official warning Harry got from the Improper Use of Magic Office for using a hover charm in front of Muggles. She printed out several screen shots of Dobby, wrote a formal letter of appeal to Mafalda Hopkirk, and suggested John get in contact with Harry's head of house at Hogwarts since Ministry Officials may have trouble accepting Muggle photos. John mentioned Mr. Weasley, who worked for the Ministry, and Miss Jackie told John to get in contact with him. Then she, too, left.

Sherlock was very excited when John told him what happened later that night.

"Underage magic is detected by proximity only, and the actual person who did it may not be identified under certain conditions," he muttered, eyes gleaming. "Harry was standing close to the house-elf. It's reasonable to assume the Ministry of Magic is keeping track of all underage magicals. In this predominately non-magical neighbourhood, it's not surprising the Ministry of Magic assumes Harry did all magic performed in his proximity. But should Harry perform magic in a magic-dense area where wizards and witches are everywhere, chances are the Ministry won't be able to tell."

"No," said John pre-emptively rejecting whatever Sherlock was going to suggest.

"But John," Sherlock said, using the wheedling tone and look.

" *No*," John said, more firmly. "No magic experiments until the warning is rescinded. You don't want Harry to get expelled, now, do you?"

Sherlock waved dismissively. "There's no reason for the warning to stand, not with the evidence we supplied."

"You do realize we're dealing with *bureaucracy*, right?" said John. "There's going to be delays, and a rejection or two just to spice things up a bit. Paperwork will get lost. Then something else will go wrong. It won't help our case if we did something we said we didn't do."

As it turned out, the appeal process didn't take the month John predicted. They got another letter from the Improper Use of Magic office yesterday morning, which stated the Ministry of Magic had accepted their appeal and will retract the warning. Thank you, have a good summer holidays.

"That was quick," John remarked.

Sherlock sprang up from his seat. "Diagon Alley!"

John shoved him back to his seat. "Stamford Greene's Magical Bowling Alley. Dumbledore's going to meet us there."

"That's not until tomorrow evening!" Sherlock complained, trying to get up.

John sat on him. "Exactly. No rush. Now do you want me to invite Lestrade over the phone, or do you want to do it yourself in person so you can meddle in the case he's been working on this past week?"

Sherlock beamed. "I knew I asked you to marry me for a good reason."

"It only came up because you were going to die," John reminded him.

"But you agreed to it. Obviously my qualities as a husband met your expectations."

"You didn't even meet my minimum requirements. But that's okay, no one's perfect."

"Now this Voldemort character…"

Harry blinked back to the present. The adults had moved on from talking about Voldemort at his height to his fall.

"So he showed up Halloween night at the Potters' safe house and tried to kill Harry," John was saying. "Harry was, what, a year-old? Now I can understand LV wanting to kill Harry's parents, since they were elite members of the Resistance, but why would he target a

baby ? Revenge? Warning? Prophecy foretelling his Doom? What?"

Dumbledore's bushy eyebrows ascended to his hairline.

"You've actually mentioned the main reason, John, I can tell you that much. I can also tell you Lord Voldemort didn't lightly attack people in person."

John's eyebrows ascended too. "Really?"

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "Only the most powerful witches and wizards received his personal attention, which raises the question why he considered personally killing three children that year."

" *Three* ?"

Dumbledore nodded grimly. "Harry was one of the three."

There was a pause.

"Did he kill Cecilia?" asked Mr. Lestrade. He had the torn look of someone who desperately wanted to know but dreaded knowing the answer.

Dumbledore regarded Mr. Lestrade thoughtfully. Then he bowed his head. Mr. Lestrade covered his mouth and his eyes welled up with tears.

"I had to know. I'm sorry, but I had to know," Mr. Lestrade muttered. "I got into Serious Crimes because I had to know: who killed her and *why* . Damn it, I finally know who did it, but I still can't close the case. *Damn you,* Cecilia!" he suddenly roared. "Of all the ways you could've got yourself killed, why did you pick murdered personally by evil dark lords? *!"*

Then Mr. Lestrade let out a choked sob and buried his face in his hands. Mrs. Lestrade wrapped her arms around him and wept silently. Miss Jackie had her arms around Julia, who buried her face in her bosom, and she held her tightly. Miss Jackie didn't weep, but her eyes seem to contain all the sorrow in the world.

Harry looked away. There was nothing else he could do.

The exchange left everyone very subdued. Miss Jackie glided over to the food stand and returned with enough tea to go around twice. Once the tea was drunk and the biscuits were consumed, Dumbledore spoke with the Lestrades.

"It is a tad early, but I believe today is as good as any," said Dumbledore. "Hogwarts is happy to extend Julia a place. Her name has been down in our admissions books since she was born."

"You have magical ways to find magic kids? Because I'm pretty sure my father-in-law didn't apply Julia to your school," said Mr. Lestrade.

"Indeed, yes," Dumbledore replied.

"What is she going learn there? Besides magic, I mean?" asked Mrs. Lestrade.

Dumbledore told them about the astronomy classes, History of Magic, and flying lessons. Mr. Lestrade looked satisfied, but Mrs. Lestrade frowned.

"So you don't offer English and Literature? No art classes?" she asked.

"Alas, no," said Dumbledore regretfully. "We have extracurricular clubs that allows students to study those subjects on their own, but they are not part of the official curriculum. I've been petitioning the school board for additional budget so we can have music classes at least, but so far my defeat has been complete."

Mrs. Lestrade scratched her head. "No offence, sir, but the education Hogwarts offer sounds very… um, skewed."

"It's a school of *magic*, what else were you expecting?" Sherlock groused.

Mrs. Lestrade glared at him. "Doesn't mean you have to cut off everything else!"

"Good riddance," Sherlock dismissed.

"It's a good thing people like you are rare," Mrs. Lestrade snarled.

Harry mentally clapped. Mrs. Lestrade definitely had strong nerves.

"The other side of the problem is the lack of qualified teachers," said Dumbledore calmly, while Sherlock and Mrs. Lestrade glared at each other. "We don't have schools for those who wish to dedicate themselves to literature and arts. It would be nice if the transition from Hogwarts to a Muggle university were easier, but many of our kind do not see any point in learning from our Muggle peers."

He sighed. Then he turned to Miss Jackie.

"May I ask what educational path you've taken, Ms. Jacqueline?" Dumbledore asked.

Miss Jackie rubbed the back of her neck awkwardly.

"I studied at Emmanuel College, and got a degree there. I tried the scholar route, but I couldn't… Well, I applied to Royal Academy of Music for a lark, and I got in and finished with a degree in classical music. I teach piano now."

"When you're not teaching cello, guitar, drums, violin or whatever instrument the student fancies," injected Mrs. Lestrade.

"Or composing and performing," Mr. Lestrade chimed in.

"Stop it," Miss Jackie muttered to her hands, flushing ugly pink up to her ears. Sherlock looked disgusted.

Dumbledore, on the other hand, beamed.

"Could I possibly entice you to be Hogwarts' first music instructor?"

Miss Jackie looked up surprised-and confused. "But you just said Hogwarts doesn't…"

"Please?" said Dumbledore, looking distressed in an exaggerated way. "After hiring yet another Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher after the previous one lasted only a year and meeting the only available candidate, I'm inclined towards a bit of recklessness.

Giving the students the gift of music is the least I can do."

Miss Jackie stared, wide-eyed and then floundered. After waving her slim hands about, she drooped and said she'd think about it. She only moonlighted as a music teacher, and she had a day-job as a systems engineer for a Muggle firm in London.

"Thank you. Now," Dumbledore clapped his hands. "I have only one more thing to ask from you. Would you terribly mind if you gave us a small concert? Consider it part of the interview process."

Mr. Lestrade immediately requested Miss Jackie to play *Smooth Criminal* on Cello. Mrs. Lestrade said no, Jackie must play the *Charlie Brown Medley* number on Piano. John suggested the My Sassy Girl version of Pachelbel's Canon, and Sherlock, true to form, called everyone philistines and declared Chopin's Fantasie Impromptu was the *obvious* choice.

"That's all nice, but there's this small problem of not having any instruments," said Miss Jackie.

Dumbledore conjured a cello, several violins, two guitars and a black grand piano with a casual flick of his wand. Miss Jackie stared at the instruments, at Dumbledore, and back again.

"Of course. Magic," said Miss Jackie, dazedly. "Appa was right. I can never be a witch. Julia, what do you want me play?"

Julia Lestrade thought for a moment.

"STAR WARS!" she declared.

Miss Jackie flashed the first grin Harry had ever seen.

"Okay."

She sat down with the cello between her knees. She picked up the bow and adjusted the strings. Then she tapped the frog smartly on her palm.

The bow turned into a lightsaber.

Before Harry could wrap his mind around this, Miss Jackie proceeded to play *The Imperial March* .

By the time she played five different Star Wars Themes, it was clear "playing the cello" didn't adequately describe what Miss Jackie could do with a cello. Besides the normal bowing and plucking, Miss Jackie used the cello as a percussion instrument, drumming the body with her palms and fingers, and beating the strings with the stick-side of the bow. She never missed a note when transitioning from percussion to bowing and vice versa, and *somehow all worked* .

The entire bowling alley burst into an applause when Miss Jackie finished. Dumbledore wiped his eyes.

"Ah, music," he said, sounding very moved indeed. "Magic beyond anything a wizard can do. Miss Jacqueline, I welcome you to Hogwarts."

Final Notes : I really shouldn't spend so much time writing, but I had a lot of free time at work, so… ahem. I hope I didn't scare people with the logic. It was mostly inspired by this quote from S2E1: "My brother has the mind of a scientist or a philosopher, but he elects to be a detective." I figured I'd give Sherlock the chance to play the philosopher a bit. The thesis is going well, thank you all those people who wished me luck. :)

Big kudos and recs to ThePianoGuys. The concert is a very obvious nod to Steven Sharp Nelson and the Cello Wars.

Life Among Muggles

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Seventeen: Life Among Muggles

It was early morning hours in Ottery St. Catchpole. The sun was making efforts for the day, a speck of gold peeking over the hill tops. The village was still fast asleep except for one residence. The house at first glance looked like a large stone pigpen with extra-rooms added and propped up by magic. The sign at the entrance read: THE BURROW. The ground floor windows of the home were illuminated and shadowy figures were moving about. The sounds of busy footsteps were broken intermittently with that of stubbed feet, colliding people, and muffled words.

Then the door to the main entrance burst open, and a family of freckled red-heads spilled out. Twin boys identical to the last freckle stumbled half-asleep towards the turquoise Ford Anglia parked just outside the garage with pieces of toast stuffed in their mouths. A plump, kind-looking matriarch of the group herded her two tall and lanky sons whilst clinging to her young daughter's hand. She was followed by her tall and balding husband, who was carrying four sleeping bags.

"Hurry up, you lot!" barked Molly Weasley. "We don't want to get stuck in the commuter traffic!"

George opened the car's boot, and the rest of the Weasleys piled all the sleeping bags and rugsacks into it. Though the outside dimensions suggested the boot could only accommodate half of their luggage, the inside showed the boot was magically expanded to fit a small garden shed. Molly and Ginny got into the front seat, which was stretched to resemble a park bench. Percy, Fred, George and Ron sat comfortably next to each other in the back in that order.

"Muggles do know more than we give them credit for, don't they?" said Molly as she looked back at her sons. "I mean, you'd never know it was this roomy from the outside, would you?"

Arthur turned the ignition and started to drive. They'd barely made it out of driveway when they had to turn around because Fred forgot to bring his Dr. Filibuster's Fabulous Wet-Start, No-Heat Fireworks. They almost reached the motorway when Ginny shrieked that she'd left her toiletry bag at home. Tempers were running high and traffic was heavy when they finally started to make their way to London.

Arthur checked his watch. "Molly, dear-"

"No, Arthur," said Molly.

"No one has to know… we can make it to London in thirty minutes if we-"

" *No*, Arthur. Not in the broad daylight, whatever it is you're thinking. Ron, tell Harry we're running late."

Ron sent a quick text message. He got a reply almost immediately. "Harry says okay."

There was silence for exactly three seconds before Molly started patting her hair nervously.

"I do hope we don't offend Harry's Muggle parents," said Molly. "I mean, we've never been to a Muggle home before."

"We'll be fine, Molly," said Arthur with barely contained excitement. "Harry said his family takes weekly trips to Diagon Alley. I'm sure they're used to our ways. Now I wonder if they'd let me exam their Teckevision…"

"Do you think Harry will like my birthday card?" piped Ginny. "Does he like green? The lavender one was nicer, but it was such a girly colour I didn't pick it."

"I don't think he's that fussed about colour. He might object to the ditty, though," said Fred whilst doodling on Percy's face, who was snoring against the window.

Ginny clutched her cheeks in dismay. "I knew it! I knew I should've got a regular card, not a singing one! What do I do? Harry's going to hate it!"

"I'm sure Harry won't mind, Ginny, so calm down," said Molly.

"How many plugs do you think Harry's home has? Do they have a compooter? I always wanted to see one," said Arthur.

"He said he has a laptop, Dad," George replied whilst joining Fred in his doodling. "I'm not sure why you have to put it on your lap, but…"

"Do you think he'll like my present?" Ginny interjected. "Ron said he likes novels, but he didn't tell me what kind, so I just picked one. By the way, did Percy really try to take his Christmas present? That's so rude."

"He *did,"* said Fred tragically. "Just because the book was on the banned list…"

Ron sighed deeply through his nose. His family had been like this all summer, ever since Harry said he wanted to invite his family to his flat in London. They got worse when the invitation actually came. It was driving him nuts.

"Ron, you've talked to Harry's Muggle father before. What is he like?" asked Arthur.

Ron tried to come up with a description, and came up short.

"He's very clever. Like, brilliant." *And super rude*, Ron didn't say.

"What does he do?" Molly asked.

"He's a consulting detective," said Ron.

Everyone stared at Ron blankly.

"What's a consulting detective?" asked George.

"Exactly what it sounds like," said Ron. "When the Muggle law enforcement can't figure out a crime, they consult Sherlock."

Arthur made a thoughtful humming noise. "And Harry's Muggle Mum is a Muggle Healer?"

"An Army doctor; she did muggle healing work in Afghanistan," said Ron.

"The Muggles are having war there, aren't they?" said Arthur knowledgably. "What a brave woman."

"Harry sounds brave too, and brilliant," said Ginny dreamily. "He fought that evil git Quirrell and protected the Philosopher's Stone."

"I helped," Ron was quick to add.

"He's a good kid," said George. He was adding a monocle to the handlebar moustache Fred penned on Percy's face. "You should see him fly. He's already as good as Charlie and he's only been flying for a year."

It was more impressive than that, Ron thought. Harry, who was rather spectacularly ignorant of everyday wizard things, didn't even know Quidditch existed until he came to Hogwarts. Ron will never forget the day he asked Harry his favourite Quidditch team and Harry innocently asked him what is Quidditch. The subsequent furore to explain the best sport in the world to Harry Potter was interesting to say the least.

"His biggest flaw is that he acts like an old man," said Fred, now drawing extra eyebrows for Percy. "You'd think he's a hundred-years-old, the way he likes to sit in front of a fire wrapped in a blanket."

"And walk around with his hands behind his back, looking all sad

and solemn," George said. "Not that he's *actually* sad, mind, he just has a face that looks sad by default."

Ron said nothing, even though he wanted to defend his friend. His mother cried buckets when he told her about the Surrey Zoo bombing that killed Harry's muggle relatives. He didn't want to know how she'd react to learning Harry had trouble keeping himself warm-hence the huddling in front of the fire-and had silent spells that lasted for hours-hence the walks to get out of it-because of the bombing, but it was going to trigger a massive flooding for sure.

"Well, I don't doubt he's very mature," said Molly, frowning. Then she noticed Percy's face. "WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING?"

The shout jerked Percy back into consciousness. Ron and Ginny giggled at his befuddled look. Their mother then proceeded to yell so loudly at Fred and George, the Muggles driving beside their car stared as they passed by.

"I can't *believe* this!" Molly seethed as she pointed her wand at Percy's face to remove the marks. " *What* would Harry's family think if they saw you acting like this!"

They arrived at London about fifteen minutes late. Arthur momentarily forgot they were headed to Baker Street and drove to King's Cross Station out of habit. It took them a long time to figure out how to get from King's Cross Station to the Marylebone district. They asked several Muggle police officers for directions, two of which Arthur had to obliviate because they got suspicious. At long last they found Speedy's Café just off the main road. The café was on the ground level of a nondescript three-story building. The door next to the café had several pastel-coloured balloons tied to the handle.

"221B-we're here!" said Arthur, as he mopped his sweaty forehead.

They queued in front of the door. Molly took a moment to nervously fuss over their clothing. Arthur hesitated between pressing the electric buzzer and using the knocker until he decided to press the buzzer. In a few moments, the door creaked open, and a small black haired boy, who had large almond shaped green eyes, peered out.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY HARRY!" they all shouted.

Harry grinned and let them inside. They exchanged greetings, shakes of hands and playful thumps in the dimply lit and sparsely decorated parlour. Then a Muggle wearing a maroon cardigan, blue chequer shirt and black trousers came downstairs. Though quite young, the Muggle had prominent bags under the eyes, and moved like someone who used to be a lot bigger and healthier.

"You must be Mr. Holmes! Ron told me all about you!" said Arthur enthusiastically, hand outstretched.

The Muggle shook his hand with a wry smile. "John Watson. Sherlock's upstairs."

Ron was puzzled. The Muggle in front of him sounded a lot like the John he heard over the phone last year, but only vaguely resembled the pretty Muggle woman he saw at King's Cross. Was this a same-named relative, he wondered.

"Oh, sorry about that," Arthur apologised.

"No, it's fine," said John. "Did you have any problems with the meter?"

Arthur patted Ron on the shoulder, beaming. "Thanks to your Christmas gift, Ron here knew all about Muggle coins. He sorted it out."

John smiled. "Good. Now do you need a hand with your luggage?"

They returned to the car to take out the sleeping bags they forgot in their excitement. Harry stared incredulously at the cavernous boot, and gaped at the inner dimensions of the car proper. Then the Weasleys followed John and Harry back into the flat and up the stairs. The door on the first floor was slightly ajar, and unfamiliar music flowed out through the crack. John pushed the door wide open, and Ron looked in at Harry's flat for the first time.

Beyond the door was a cosy and cluttered sitting room. Blue and white streamers, ribbons and balloons were taped to the walls. One of the balloons burst when Fred brushed it by accident, and a white

streamer fell off for no apparent reason. A banner that read 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY HARRY!' was hanging off the ceiling near the windows. The wooden table between the two windows was laden with plates, cups, and all sorts of food and bottles of fizzy drinks. There was also a clock that told you nothing but the time. What looked like a bull's head wearing white earmuffs was mounted on the wall directly above the table. On the left there were two built-in bookshelves, which were both filled with books that had titles like: *On the Origin of Species*, *A Practical Guide to Urban Beekeeping, The Lancet* and *The Man Who was Thursday* . Between the two bookshelves was a fireplace so tiny it was practically useless and a mirror that remained resolutely silent even when Molly asked politely. The mantelpiece above the fireplace had a human skull wearing a party hat and a blow-out squawker clamped between its teeth and a jack-knife pinning a small pile of mail into it. One of the bookshelves had a black screen Ron guessed was a Tevevision. There were two armchairs before the fireplace, one made of fabric and the other leather seats and a metal frame. The coffee table on the other side had five brightly wrapped presents. A grey leather couch and small upright piano were leaning against a wall that had a yellow smiley face painted on it. Shiny plastic or metallic devices of various sizes and shapes were scattered all around the flat, their long cords and plugs indicating they ran on eklectricity. Unless Ron's ears and eyes were deceiving him, the white, sleek and shiny Muggle device with a tiny screen sitting on a music stand between two speakers was playing Muggle music.

"It's not much," said Harry.

"This is so cool," said Ron, completely fascinated at all the gadgetry.

"Very cool," said George, as he grinned stupidly at the oddly shaped glassware sitting on the kitchen table.

"Super cool," agreed Fred, who was mesmerized at the poster that featured a human skull that didn't move.

"It's wonderful! Look, Molly!" Arthur exclaimed, eyes shining with glee, as he pointed at a device that looked like thin metal folder propped up at a right angle. Its raised back had a glowing light that was shaped like an apple that was bitten into. "That's a laptop

compooter, is it not? Yes, I see the screen and pug. I collect plugs. And batteries. I have a large collection of batteries at home. My wife thinks I'm mad, but there you go."

John smiled indulgently. "Sure."

That moment a very familiar deep voice resounded in the room.

"Weasley, I presume."

A tall thin man dressed in a tailored black suit and purple shirt swaggered into the sitting room through the kitchen. It took a few seconds for Ron to realise the man was Sherlock. He didn't fit the image of the man he remembered seeing at King's Cross last year, but the cultured tone and voice was unmistakable. The man also had the same long face and full lips, wide slanted eyes and curly hair. Ron thought he was rather unusual-looking, but his mother was staring at him and fanning her face, which was slowly turning pink.

"Ah, Mr. Holmes," said Arthur, smiling and offering his hand.

"Sherlock, please," said Sherlock in his deep voice, shaking it. Molly turned pinker.

"This is a lovely flat, and you have so many interesting Muggle artefacts!" said Arthur, looking around in delight.

"Aren't some of these really expensive?" asked George, poking a finger at the tevevision. "And the phone you sent to Dad didn't look cheap."

"Oh I had a client who was in upper management of a major phone service provider," Sherlock replied. "A few years back the client's husband was accused of embezzling the company. I was able to shed light on the matter."

Arthur stared. "So you cleared the husband's name?"

Sherlock's face twisted into a smirk.

"Oh, no, I proved they were *both* defrauding the company, separately."

There was a moment of stunned silence.

"Drinks anyone?" asked John loudly, heading towards sitting room table.

Fred and George raised their hands eagerly. Percy asked for a cup of water in a dignified voice. Molly and Arthur stood back and studied Sherlock and John. Molly pointed out the wedding bands on their ring fingers and Arthur nodded in reassuring way. Ron suddenly realised there were no other adults in the flat, and his thoughts went somewhere it had never gone before. Apparently everyone thought the same thing, because Ron could see the question looming over his family's heads.

"So, um, John is your husband?" Arthur asked to Sherlock.

John's hand twitched. Harry had the shuttered look he wore whenever someone was being overtly wizard.

"Mr. Weasley, John is my *Mum*," said Harry.

The knut dropped.

" *Ooooh*… !" Arthur cried, looking utterly abashed.

"We're so sorry!" flustered Molly, turning as red as her hair. "We didn't- oh goodness, I should've realised… !"

John quickly waved it off. "No, no, no, it's fine. You saw me with long hair."

"This is just *stupid*," Sherlock complained. "John has a masculine gait and name, yes, but it's *obvious* from the rise and curvature of the chest and-"

"Sherlock, *no*," John groaned, throwing up both hands.

"… Wanna go see my room?" asked Harry as the situation between the adults further degenerated.

Ron, Fred, George and Ginny followed Harry up another flight of stairs.

"Sorry about our Dad, Harry," said George at the landing between the first and second floor. "He can't help it. He's crazy about Muggles and Muggle stuff. He was over the moon when you included him in the invite. Then he drove Mum mad wondering if your parents could explain to him how aeroplanes can fly."

"It's okay," said Harry. "Sherlock was super excited about having wizards in the flat too. He was up all night compiling questions. You should've heard John trying to prepare him this morning. ' *Okay, Sherlock, first things first: no, deductions. Second:* no *deductions. I know you don't care, but it's dangerous to annoy people who can turn you into a toad. No traumatizing children. Conceal smart-ass until it's too late. And finally,* NO DEDUCTIONS, *okay!* ?'"

They all laughed.

"So this deduction thing, what is it?" asked Fred. Ron had tried to explain, but failed miserably because all he could remember was Sherlock's rapid-fire talking and the general sense Sherlock had a good reason to form his conclusions.

Harry thought for a moment.

"Percy was cooped up in his room all summer writing a lot of letters wasn't he?" he said.

All of their jaws dropped.

"How did you know that!?" Fred shouted.

Harry's eyes crinkled mischievously.

"There's a huge indent on Percy's right middle finger and he has ink smudges on the edge of his palm," Harry explained, raising his right hand and touching his own middle finger with his thumb, "Like he used the quill a lot. He could be doing school stuff, but then you used an old owl to deliver your letters."

"Yeah, we used Errol, our family owl," said George. "But what does that have to do with Percy?"

"The first time I saw you and your family, I noticed you had an owl,"

said Harry.

"That was Hermes," said Ron. "Percy got him for being made a Prefect."

Harry nodded. "Ron complained to me how Errol was ancient and it wasn't the first time he collapsed delivering a letter. So why keep using Errol if you have Hermes? If Percy refused to let you borrow him, your Mum could've made him share, especially since we were having so much trouble with the Owl Post. But you didn't. Why? Because Hermes wasn't there for you to borrow. Percy looks pale, like he hasn't gone outside for a while. What was he doing? Writing a lot, judging from his hands. What makes sense of everything? Percy was spending a lot of time in his room writing letters and Hermes was out delivering them."

" *Brilliant!* " cried Fred and George.

Harry grinned sheepishly. "That's basically what Sherlock does. I'm just cheating. Sherlock figured it out the moment Errol brained him two days ago delivering your letter and it only took him *seconds* . I only managed to fill in the blanks today."

"It's still brilliant," said Ron fervently.

Harry held his hands up in a self-deprecating way, "Cheating."

They reached the second floor, but not before they picked up all the books Ginny knocked over when she walked blindly into a chest of drawers with an awestruck expression her face. There was a door painted in blue there, which surrounding frame was also painted blue and modelled to look like a Muggle police box. On the door there was a white sign that said:

POLICE TELEPHONE

FREE FOR USE OF PUBLIC

Advice & Assistance Obtainable Immediately

Officers & Cars Respond to all calls

PULL TO OPEN

"It's bigger on the inside," said Harry, grinning. Ron had a sense that this was some kind of Muggle joke, because obviously rooms were always bigger than their doors and usually bigger than the house that contained them.

Harry's room looked quite normal except for the strange stillness Ron started to associate with Muggle homes. Sunlight filtered through a window that had blinders drawn halfway down. The walls were painted a bright, cheerful green. The twin-sized bed in the corner had a duvet that was the same shade of blue as the door. The desk beneath the window was littered with parchment and Muggle foolscap, and Hedwig's cage was sitting on one end, with Hedwig sleeping inside. In the middle of the desk was Harry's cauldron, sitting on a metal stand over a burner, looking as though it had been used quite often (Harry, you bad boy, Ron thought). There was a model aeroplane hanging on the ceiling, as well as a flimsy paper mobile of the solar system. Two Muggle posters adorned the walls. One had a yellow label 'STAR WARS', and showed two men wearing brown cloaks, one older with a beard, and a younger man with short cropped hair and a tiny little pony tail on the back of his head. Both were wielding rods of light. The other poster had the label 'DOCTOR WHO' in the same shade of blue as Harry's duvet and door, and had a young man without eyebrows wearing braces, a bow-tie and a brown tweed suit, floating in front of a very pretty red-headed woman wearing a scandalously short skirt (Ron couldn't believe Harry was allowed to have it on his wall-if *he* put up something like that, his Mum would've buried his dead body in the back garden for the Gnomes to eat). Harry's trunk was sitting at the foot of the bed, open, and his robes spilling over the sides. There was bookshelf right next to the desk, and it was filled with an assortment of books, many of them Muggle novels, judging from the covers (the pictures didn't move). There was *Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and a copy of the *Chronicles of Narnia* that was read so often it was falling apart . There was also *Tales of Adriana*, the wizard book Harry had a row with Percy over, looking well-thumbed. Harry's school books were there, too, looking too clean to have been read indecently often. On the bottom shelf was Harry's wand, inside the original box he must have got when he bought it from

Ollivander's, and a small stuffed bear wearing a blue overcoat, Wellingtons and a red hat.

"That's a Paddington bear," said Harry, following Ron's glance. "It's the first gift John ever got me."

"What's this?" asked Fred from the floor. He was pulling out a cardboard box from underneath Harry's bed.

"Oh, those are field rations," said Harry, walking over to Fred and George. "Muggle military troops have them in their packs when they go the battlefield."

"Why do *you* have them?" asked George, holding up a bar of chocolate that said 'Yorkie; It's NOT for civvies!'

Harry shrugged. "Just because."

Harry looked a bit tense when Fred and George took out the box's contents and scattered them all over the floor: a tin of beans, a bag of instant porridge, Biscuits Brown, two tins of instant soup, chicken with mushroom and pasta, hard candy, instant coffee and tea bags. He relaxed once the items were put back into the box, and the box was pushed back underneath the bed.

"It's very Muggle, isn't it?" said Harry as he sat on his swivel chair backwards.

"I like it," said Ron, as he stared at DOCTOR WHO poster.

"It's really nice," said Ginny breathlessly, speaking for the first time since they got there.

Harry beamed. Ginny stumbled backwards and toppled over a bedside table Ron hadn't noticed. Ginny went scarlet and clumsily picked up the picture frames that fell on the floor. The pictures were variations of John and Harry, John and Harry and Sherlock, and a couple photos of Harry alone. Harry looked really small in them.

"So when's Hermione coming?" asked Ron, trying not to stare at the pretty red-headed woman on the DOCTOR WHO poster (he kept failing).

"Later this afternoon. She and her parents are going to pick up Neville from the Leaky Cauldron on their way," said Harry.

"You invited Neville?" said George.

"Uh-huh," said Harry. "I invited Dean and Seamus and Terry and Justin, too, but Dean had family stuff, Seamus and Terry live too far away and their parents couldn't make the trip."

"What about Justin?" Ron asked.

"He'll be here for the party, but he can't sleep over," Harry said.

They talked about each other's summers. Harry entertained them all by regaling the hairbrained experiments on magic Sherlock had cooked up, one of which took them to the deepest, darkest Surrey to see if Muggles could fly a broom solo (they couldn't; John was very disappointed). They had also tried to find out how far they could push the restriction against underage magic: caring for magical plants were fine; so were brewing potions that didn't require wands; spells were an obvious no-no.

"So that's what you've been doing all summer? Doing experiments?" said Ron.

"When I'm not carting over books about Vol-, er, You-Know-Who for Sherlock," Harry sighed. "Then there was that accidental trip to Knockturn Alley."

" *Excellent!* " shouted Fred and George.

"We were never allowed there," said Ron enviously.

"You're not missing anything," said Harry darkly. "It's a really dodgy place. I don't fancy going back there again."

"What did you find?" asked Fred eagerly.

"There was this shop called Borgin and Burkes. They had a cursed opal necklace that supposedly claimed the lives of nineteen Muggles, a hand of glory, a hangman's noose, some masks… Oh, and I saw Malfoy there."

Ron ears perked. "Draco Malfoy?"

"Not Lucius Malfoy's son?" said George.

"I think so. Draco isn't exactly a common name, is it?"

"I've heard Dad talking about Lucius Malfoy," said George. "He was a big supporter of You-Know-Who."

"And when You-Know-Who disappeared," said Fred, "He came back saying he'd never meant any of it. Load of dung- Dad reckons he was right in You-Know-Who's inner circle."

Harry scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't know anything about that, but Malfoy was with his father. They were buying something. Mr. Malfoy mentioned your father's name while he was talking to Mr. Burke. Something about a new Muggle Protection Act."

"Yeah, Dad's been pushing for one at the Ministry," said George.

"What does your Dad do?" asked Harry.

"He works at the most boring department," said Ron. "The Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office."

Harry looked blank. "The *what* ?"

"It has to with bewitching things that are Muggle-made, in case they end up in a Muggle shop or house," explained George. "Like last year, some old witch died and her tea set was sold to an antiques shop. A Muggle bought it and tried to serve tea in it."

"What happened?"

"The teapot went berserk and squirted boiling-hot tea everywhere, and someone ended up in the hospital with a pair of sugar tongs clamped to his nose. It was a nightmare- Dad was working overtime for weeks. It's just Dad and this old warlock called Perkins at the office, and it took them weeks to cover it up, putting memory charms and everything…"

Harry boggled. "But your car… the *boot*…"

"Yeah, Dad enchanted it. Our shed is full of Muggle stuff. Dad takes them apart, puts spells on it, and then puts it back together. If he ever raided *our* house, he'd have to put himself under arrest. It drives Mum mad."

Harry was shaking his head when someone knocked on the door.

"Hey," said John, opening the door, "Hermione and Neville are almost here. We're going to start the cake soon."

Everyone got to their feet eagerly. Party time!

Ron had never been to a mostly-Muggle birthday party before, but he was sure they didn't go the way Harry's did.

Sherlock and John had outdone themselves with the food. Ron didn't recognise *any* of them except for the cake, pizza and ice cream, but everything was very delicious. Mr. and Mrs. Granger, who stayed after bringing Hermione and Neville to 221B, jokingly asked if John and Sherlock had patronized every poplar food place that did takeaway in Greater London. Sherlock scoffed at the idea, claimed he would never do something so asinine and wasteful, and said he just blackmailed all the food places Harry liked with all the violations they were committing because it's rare to find one that *didn't*, at which point John told him to shut up, please, just let the kids eat.

John brought out the Muggle movies after everyone ate to the point of bursting. Mr. Granger helped Sherlock set up a white thick sheet called a projector screen while Ron's Muggle-raised friends debated which film they should watch. Then, just when Ron thought the room was too small for everyone to sit and watch comfortably, John did something at the mantelpiece and the sitting room suddenly expanded to three times its original size.

"Ooh, an undetectable extension charm!" said Hermione, looking very surprised and impressed.

"With a built-in trigger!" said Arthur, admiring it. "Very clever bit of charm work here. How did you get it done?"

"I'm teaching a wizard Martial Arts. He did it," John said.

Everyone but Harry and Sherlock started.

"Why did he want to learn that?" asked Arthur.

"He's into security and defence," John explained. "He wanted to see if a trained Muggle who knows a bit about magic can trump a Wizard who knows less than nothing about Muggles."

Hermione, Arthur and Mr. Granger looked fascinated.

"So what's the verdict?" asked Mr. Granger.

"As long as the Muggle is not caught unawares, beating up wizards is easy-peasy."

Ron and his brothers stared at John, open mouthed.

"Oh, c'mon, you're having us on!" George protested.

"Nope," said John.

"How do you even know he's good?" challenged Fred.

"He has Dumbledore's stamp of approval," said John.

"So is he super-crazy powerful now?" asked Ron.

"He wishes," John huffed. "He has good reason to believe he's a powerful wizard, but he's not much of an athlete."

"He must be learning a lot, though," said Hermione.

"Nah," said John.

"Why not?"

"He's a *wretched* student. In fact, he's the most wretched student I've ever had," John groused.

Harry stuffed a cushion to his face and started shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Why is he a bad student?" asked Mr. Granger. "He sounds very self-motivated. It's not because of his lack of athleticism, surely?"

"Of course it isn't," said John. "And he's self-motivated, yes, but he's always convinced he knows better."

" *Ah.* "

"I kept telling him needs Cardio and Strength training," John grumbled. "But he says no, he doesn't have the time for such silly things. So I tell him teacher's orders. He sneers. I tattle to Dumbledore. Dumbledore gives him the Eyebrow. Only then he starts doing it, very resentfully."

Harry was now pressing the pillow so hard to his face, he just might suffocate himself. The others were all sniggering uncontrollably.

"Have you tried training with him?" asked Mrs. Granger.

"I did. Once," John sighed. "It's been two weeks and he hasn't come back. Such a fragile ego."

Harry finally lost it and let out a series of high-pitched giggles. Everyone else burst out laughing.

They watched Star Wars as promised. Ron wasn't impressed to be honest. The fight scenes were mesmerizing and Queen Padme was very pretty, if a bit unnerving when she wore her full-on makeup, but it felt like the film was trying too hard to look cool. He liked the Pixar movies better, particularly the one about monsters who scared children for a living, it was a riot.

When they emerge from the film watching haze, feeling content and well entertained, they found Arthur and Sherlock commiserating over something in the kitchen. It was as ominous as it sounded.

"What. Are. You. Doing?" John demanded, somehow looking incredibly dangerous just by clenching and unclenching both fists.

Arthur jumped and shifted guiltily from where he and Sherlock were dismantling the laptop with the bitten apple shaped light on the back. Sherlock showed no such contrition. Then Molly joined the fray.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO THAT LAPTOP ARTHUR?" she roared.

"… Just adding shrinking charm, Molly," mumbled Arthur, "and the feather-weight spell. Sherlock wanted to know if it was possible to make the laptop more portable…"

"That's *my* laptop, Sherlock," John bit out. " *Mine* . Why didn't you use your own?"

"Mine was in the bedroom," said Sherlock, as if this was a reasonable explanation.

"That's *illegal*, Arthur!" Molly bellowed. "We have laws against this sort of thing! You should know, you've been arresting Mundugus Fletcher for his biting kettles often enough!"

"Ah, well, Molly, that's the thing," said Arthur. "There's a loophole in the law, you see… As long as a wizard isn't *intending* to shrink a computer, the fact that it *can* doesn't…"

"Arthur Weasley, you made sure there was a loophole when you wrote that law!" shouted Molly. "Just so you can keep tinkering with the Muggle rubbish in your shed! And don't think I don't know what you've done to that rusty old car you bought to supposedly figure out how it works! I caught your sons *flying* that car more than once!"

"Did they really?" said Arthur eagerly. "Did it go all right? I- I mean," he faltered as sparks flew from Molly's eyes, "that- that was very wrong, boys- very wrong indeed…"

"Did you at least backup my hard drive?" John hissed between gritted teeth while Molly swelled like a bullfrog.

Sherlock looked sideways. "I might have neglected that."

John exploded.

"I was writing up cases! What if they're *gone!* ? Do you have any idea how long it takes me to write these things! *?"*

"Considering the amount of grumbling you were doing over the latest write up, perhaps it is for the best that you started from scratch-"

"No. Stop. Worst Response."

"John- John calm down. It's okay."

"NO IT'S *NOT* ! IT'S NOT OKAY!"

Everyone beat a hasty retreat to Harry's bedroom and stayed there until the shouting stopped. When they came back, Molly was throwing dirty looks at her husband, every now and then muttering things like "don't know what you were thinking of," and "never would have believed it," and John was smouldering silently next to her, arms crossed. Sherlock and Arthur were on the other corner of the living room, as far away from John and Molly as they could manage.

"Ah, Harry, why don't you start opening your presents?" said Arthur brightly, his neck as red as his hair.

Harry sat before the coffee table where they'd piled up his presents, and his friends sat around the table. Sherlock scanned the gifts and then flicked his eyes to John.

"John?"

"Yes, darling?"

Sherlock looked rather unsettled.

"I think our present is still in the closet," said Sherlock.

"Yes, sugar crumpet, I think so too," John replied.

Sherlock definitely looked disturbed. He crab-walked against the wall and vanished into the hall next to kitchen. He didn't return until Harry finished unwrapping the luxury Eagle quill Hermione got for him, the sonic screwdriver replica from Justin, the small potted floo

plant Neville brought, Ginny's birthday card, which sang the Happy Birthday song shrilly unless it was stuffed back into its envelope, and the mountain of homemade toffee and Honeydukes Chocolate, plus *Flying with the Cannons* Ron and his family got for Harry.

The presents Sherlock retrieved from the closet weren't wrapped parcels. They were in three manila envelopes, one looking as if it had a thick book enclosed and one a small box. Sherlock sat down next to Harry and opened the flap of the envelope with a box inside.

"Mycroft put this one together," said Sherlock, his voice a pitch lower than his normal tone. "My brother is useful for some things."

He pulled out two muggle photographs and three yellowed documents. The color photograph was an old wedding photograph featuring a redheaded man and a blond-haired woman. The blond woman had Harry's eyes. The second sepia-tone photograph, which looked even older than the wedding photo, featured a young man who looked unfamiliar except for the eyes.

"This is a photo of your grandfather and grandmother, from your mother's side," said Sherlock, holding up the wedding photo.

Harry's eyes went wide. Then he stared at the photographs in palpable amazement and awe. One by one, everyone quietly drew closer.

"Patrick Evans," said Sherlock, pointing out the man, before moving on to, "Joanne Evans." He then picked up the two documents. "This is their marriage certificate. And this is a copy of the census taken around the time your mother was born. See? They had two daughters: Petunia Evans and Lily Evans."

Harry just stared. He was beyond words.

"This is your great-grandfather, Louis," Sherlock went on, picking up the photo of the young man. "He was a French immigrant who moved to London after the First World War. He received the *Croix de guerre*, which is the non-officer equivalent of the more well known *Légion d'honneur*, for exceptional bravery in defending the village of *Courcelles-le-Comte* . This is the medal he received."

Harry took the velvet box with trembling hands. Ron noticed Hermione was tearing up. His mum was a lost-cause; she was already sobbing into her handkerchief.

Sherlock moved on to the next envelope. It was full of letters, all carefully sealed inside transparent covers and bound together neatly with binder rings.

"Letters from your parents' friends who survived the war," Sherlock explained. "One good thing about owl post is that you don't need to know where your recipient lives as long as you have a vague idea who they are. Anyway, John asked them if they could write their memories of your mother and father. These are their reminiscences."

Harry took the bundle of letters and clutched it to his chest. Sherlock picked up the last envelope and unfurled the string on the flap. He pulled out the leather-bound album inside, and wordlessly handed it over to Harry. Harry carefully opened it and let out a small gasp.

The album was full of wizarding photographs. Every single one featured a man with messy black hair and a pretty red-haired woman who had Harry's eyes. One had to be blind to not recognise who they were.

"Photos of your mother and father," said Sherlock quietly. "Hagrid put it together for you. He knew you didn't have any."

"It was such a lovely thing they did, giving you those photos," Hermione whispered inside her sleeping bag.

She, Ron and Harry were in Harry's room, all clustered inside their sleeping bags after a long day of partying. Fred had set off his fireworks after the presents, which set the streamers ablaze. The subsequent effort to put out the fire was much hampered because the Arthur was distracted by the smoke alarm. The banging and explosions caused the neighbours to file a noise complaint, and the officers who came to the scene had to be obliviated because they saw the sitting room in its magically expanded state. Once the

hubbub was over, everyone except Sherlock was too tired to stay up much longer. Justin left with his mother half-asleep. Neville, Fred, George and Percy got into their sleeping bags and started snoring. Arthur and Molly stayed up talking to Mr. and Mrs. Granger and John (Sherlock had fled to his room) until Hermione's parents left to catch their train back home, after which they joined Ginny in the wizard tent John had pitched up inside sitting room. Now the flat was quiet except for the noise of London traffic outside.

"I never expected it," said Harry softly. "I mean, I always wanted to know, but I didn't know if it was okay to ask."

"Because it might sound like you don't think Sherlock and John are your parents?" asked Hermione.

"Uh-huh. And…"

That moment, they heard John tiredly saying, yes, Sherlock, good job behaving, I know it must have been very exhausting for you to act so out of character; sure, you can go and play with the diseased foot you've been eyeing at Barts, why not, just make sure you wear a HAZMAT suit when you do.

"… Sherlock doesn't do sentiment," Harry finished.

Eventually Harry and Hermione's breathing evened out. Ron clung to consciousness a bit longer, and stared sleepily at the poster of Amy Pond.

Voices filtered up again:

"Do you think he liked it? His birthday? Almost everything went wrong."

"Parties always go wrong, John, especially in here."

"Oh, that's comforting."

A sigh.

"Relaxed posture, no tenseness except for that time you got angry, persistent laughter, bottomless appetite, dilated pupils and elevated

heart rate when he received his gifts. Conclusion: Harry enjoyed his birthday very much. Now go to sleep, John."

Ron fell asleep.

Final Notes : Yes, that was my idea of Harry's Birthday party. Ron liking Karen Gillan and her mini-skirt, Arthur and Sherlock becoming BFFs, and Sherlock speaking French words with his jaguar-cello voice :) The genealogy I got from watching Who Do You Think You Are, UK version. The details are from JKR's episode.

He Solves Crimes and I Blog About It

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Eighteen: He Solves Crimes and I Blog About It

Arthur Weasley woke up to the smell of frying bacon. He had a moment of disorientation as he stared at the canvas ceiling until he remembered the tent Harry's Muggle parents had set up for him and Molly last night. Molly was out, and Ginny was still asleep in her cot. Arthur eagerly put on his glasses, donned his robes and left the tent.

Arthur gazed avidly at the flat. The party decorations from last night were taken away, leaving the flat in its natural state. Most of the Muggle eclecktronics he'd explored yesterday migrated to the coffee table, including the laptop computer he charmed last night (Arthur suppressed the guilty twinge associated with that memory). The boys were still snoring inside their sleeping bags like so many multicoloured slugs. The kitchen's sliding doors were open, and John and Molly were puttering about, cooking breakfast.

"So this thing is a hob," Molly was asking John, pointing at the metal object that had circular grates, one lit with a small blue fire over which John was frying bacon in a pan.

"Yep," John replied. "Don't worry, it works just fine. Good morning, Arthur."

Arthur felt his cuff grabbed as he tried to get a closer look at the hob. He vaguely muttered a good morning as he stared at the blue flames, dancing so neatly in a circle.

"What do wizards have for breakfast?" asked John. "We don't do anything more sophisticated than eggs and bacon, porridge and beans on toast."

"Oh, we do the same," said Molly. "My lot aren't picky about their food. They just eat *a lot* ."

"Sounds about right. Here, the bread is-oh, *f*…"

John snapped the breadbox shut and slumped. Arthur and Molly looked curiously.

"… Eyeballs," John muttered with suppressed fury. Then more loudly: " *Eyeballs* ?"

"Just tea for me, thanks," rumbled Sherlock's voice from down the hallway.

"There are eyeballs in the breadbox!" John shouted.

"Experiment," Sherlock replied.

"I got that, thanks," John snapped, "Just wondered if you want them in your tea. Or your toast. Either way, they're going to go."

A door opened and Sherlock flounced into the kitchen, fully dressed and wearing a teal dressing gown. He took the transparent bag full of eyeballs swimming in a clear liquid out of the breadbox and tried to put it in the fridge. John kept the door shut.

"Where else am I supposed to put it?" Sherlock groused.

"The incinerator at Barts," John replied, looking very dangerous indeed.

Sherlock didn't seem to register the danger. Arthur himself was quite puzzled despite the onset of fear. What was so wrong about having eyeballs lying about? Molly always had some at hand for potions.

Perhaps John objected to finding them in the breadbox? He asked as much.

John stared at Arthur incredulously. Arthur noticed Sherlock snuck the eyeballs into the fridge during the distraction. John's attention snapped back to Sherlock, who fled, and then to Arthur. After stewing for a few seconds, John slumped again.

"… Too hard to explain," John sighed. "I *want* to say Muggles rarely have dealings with eyeballs, particularly in the context of edibles, but I'm pretty sure there is some indigenous tribe out there somewhere that treats it as a delicacy. Well then: *British* Muggles rarely have eyeballs lying about in their kitchen unless they happen to be a serial killer or Sherlock Holmes."

Arthur wanted to ask John what a serial killer was, but Molly gave him a warning look, so he shut up.

Molly and John resumed breakfast preparations. John let Arthur experiment with a machine whose sole function was toasting bread. It was the most marvellous thing: just place slices of bread-packaged and pre-sliced! Muggles were really brilliant!-into the slots, press down the little knob on the side, and the machine toasted the bread for you. It even let you change the level of browning, and popped the toast right out of the slots to make removal easy. So ingenious!

"That's enough, Arthur," said Molly, after Arthur finished toasting an entire loaf.

Arthur glanced at the sitting room. All of the children were up and eating at the table, which was lengthen to accommodate everyone. Fred and George were in their pyjamas and inhaling beef sausages. Percy was chewing on Danish and reading a Muggle paper called The Sun. Ron and Neville were piling bacon on their toast, and Hermione was spreading butter and marmalade on hers. Ginny was spooning porridge into her bowl, but was having difficulty because she was utterly distracted at the sight of Harry, who was lifting up his plate of toast so John could slide a fried egg on top of it. Sherlock re-entered the kitchen with a mug in hand. Arthur felt his heart leap when he noticed the glass kettle that glowed blue and boiled water

without a fire in sight.

" *What in the world?* " Arthur cried, pointing at the kettle.

"Electric kettle," Sherlock said, "Uses inner coils to heat up the chamber. Note the plug."

Arthur gawked as the little button on the kettle's base snapped up and blue light that illuminated the kettle's glass body turned off. Sherlock removed the kettle from its stand and started pouring boiling water into a teapot like nothing astonishing happened (and, Arthur reminded himself, it was probably true). Sherlock clicked his tongue irritably at another Muggle artefact right next to the kettle-it had a tall white body and glass carafe on the bottom.

"Why haven't you made coffee?" Sherlock called out.

"We're out of grounds," John replied.

"We have beans," Sherlock countered, peering into a ceramic pot.

"The blade grinder isn't working," said John while sliding more scrambled eggs into Ron's plate.

Sherlock pulled a face at an object that was presumably a blade grinder (it had a *plug* ! Oh, the range and variety of eclecktic artefacts in this house!), which was coated inside and out with a sticky substance.

"We're ordering a burr grinder," he declared.

John nodded absently, "Yes, dear."

Arthur reluctantly tore his eyes away from the gadgets in the kitchen and joined the others at the table. He was glad to be affirmed of his conviction that having a meal with Muggles was no different from having a meal with wizards. True, the instruments through which the food was made and delivered were different, but the laughing and eating and talking and squabbling over the last piece of bacon was just like the breakfasts back at home.

"Do you have anything planned for today?" asked Molly.

"I planned a trip to London Zoo," said John. "But Sherlock just got a case. It looked really serious."

"A possible double homicide," said Sherlock gleefully. "No murder weapon, evidence destroyed by fire, and the bodies are missing."

John let out a gusting sigh as the children gawked. Molly looked torn; obviously she didn't want the children to hear about gruesome crimes, but didn't want to offend their Muggle host by protesting, especially after all shouting she'd done last night.

"How do you know there was a murder when there aren't any bodies?" asked George.

"Blood," Sherlock replied. "The amount of blood splattered on the walls suggests the victims lost too much blood to have survived."

The girls squealed and the boys except Percy crowed in morbid fascination. Molly started wringing her hands in visible agitation, but continued to say nothing.

"I really don't think this is a fit conversation for the table," said Percy disapprovingly.

"Oh, stuff it, Percy, I know you're interested," said Fred. "So you're going to go and investigate?"

"No," said Sherlock. "This is a six. I don't leave the flat for anything less than a seven."

The children clamoured for more information. Sherlock spun a rather evocative tale of a retired owner of a construction firm living in Norwood, one John Oldacre. Oldacre hired a new solicitor to update his will. The very day this happened, Oldacre's house was set on fire and Oldacre and his partner, Jo Amberley, went missing. The police tried to question the newly hired solicitor, John McFarlane, but he was missing as well. One of McFarlane's neighbours remembered seeing Amberley at McFarlane's flat in Blackheath, thus the police thought McFarlane killed Oldacre and ran off with Amberley, with whom he was having an affair, after burning the evidence of his crime in the fire that partially destroyed the house.

"Sounds pretty straightforward," Arthur remarked, as he noted Molly had forgotten her previous agitation as she got absorbed into the fascinating narrative.

"Of course it isn't," Sherlock snapped. "Detective Inspector Gregory is less stupid than the usual species of law enforcement: He discovered two different types of blood on the scene and realized the amount of blood required to coat the walls and carpet in the way it was discovered suggest *two* people were killed."

Arthur's eyes went wide. "So the murderer killed *two people* on the same night?"

"Presumably. The neighbours had no idea something untoward was going on until the fire," said Sherlock, grinning in a disconcerting way. "They heard no suspicious noises, and one of them was an old lady. I love old ladies. They're better than CCTV."

"Couldn't the murderer use something like a silencing spell?" asked Percy.

"Muggle sound-proofing isn't as good as Magic ones," John said. "Some noise *will* filter through. And Oldacre's house didn't have extra sound-proofing."

The children goggled as the true complexity of the mystery hit them.

"What are you going to do?" asked Ron.

"Wait for Gregory to call back. *Ah*," There was ringing noise, and Sherlock pulled out his mobile fone from his dressing gown pocket, slid his thumb against the screen and placed it to his ear. "Sherlock Holmes."

Sherlock listened to the caller. Everyone waited with bated breath.

"Who reported McFarlane was missing?" Sherlock demanded.

He frowned when the caller replied.

"Why not his parents? The papers said he lived with them." More muffled replies. "Then the question isn't why McFarlane killed

Oldacre. The question is why his father was at his home."

Sherlock's frown deepened.

"What do you mean you don't understand? It's obvious, surely?"

"Not obvious to us," Ron muttered loudly.

Harry and John quirked their lips as John scribbled on a pad of paper.

"Care to explain?" John asked.

Sherlock lowered the fone and covered the lower part with his hand.

"I take it back. Gregory is as dull as the rest of them," he grumbled, and then brought the phone back to his ear.

"Consider the facts, Inspector: none of the neighbours heard suspicious noises coming from the house on the night of the fire when the murders supposedly happened. No one entered or left the premises. McFarlane's workplace reported him missing, not his parents. You yourself discovered McFarlane lives with his ailing *mother*- singular. The papers drew the inference that McFarlane lives with his *parents* -plural. This is not an inference drawn out of vacuum. Picture this: an intrepid reporter goes to McFarlane's flat. The reporter knocks on the door and is greeted by an old man who looks remarkably like John McFarlane. The Sun reported a broken father devastated by the news of his son, coming on heels of his wife's illness. But McFarlane lives only with his mother. Who, then, is this man?"

Arthur couldn't imagine who it could be besides the obvious. Neither could Inspector Gregory, judging from the muffled sounds coming from the fone.

"Of course the man was John McFarlane's father. He needs one to exist," Sherlock snarked.

More muffled protested from the fone.

"Wrong," said Sherlock rudely. "An affair between McFarlane and

Amberley is only *one* possible explanation for their meeting. You're just assuming they're having affair because the meeting was between two gay men. I can name several more: blackmailing for example. No, I'm not suggesting this is a blackmailing case gone awry. No, Oldacre's recent money troubles have little to do with the meeting."

"So what really happened?" asked John.

Sherlock let out an aggrieved sigh.

"Oldacre and McFarlane's *mother* were the ones who were having an affair. Amberley confronted McFarlane, and realized the extent of Oldacre's duplicity after the meeting. So Amberley carried out his plan of revenge. Oh yes, he was planning this for a long time. Run additional tests on the blood samples, you should find anticoagulants. This is the reason why the neighbours heard nothing untoward despite the evidence there was huge fight. There was nothing to *hear* ."

"So are you saying *Amberley* killed Oldacre and faked his own death?" Inspector Gregory shouted, so loudly everyone could hear him from the fone.

"No," said Sherlock. "There was no murder. Amberley splattered his *and* Oldacre's blood all over the walls, and then set the house on fire to destroy the more *important* evidence: photos of John Oldacre. He *wanted* you think McFarlane killed them as long as possible, so he destroyed the photos to make sure you wouldn't draw the correct inference if and when you arrested McFarlane . "

"So where is Oldacre? And what do Oldacre's photos have anything to do with the case?"

"Oldacre is with McFarlane's mother," said Sherlock. "The old man at McFarlane's house was *him* ."

There was a stunned silence.

"So let me get this straight," said John. "Oldacre was having a *long-term* affair with McFarlane's mother. They had a son, who is John

McFarlane. Amberley suspected the affair, and his suspicions were confirmed the moment he saw McFarlane because he looks like Oldacre. Amberley staged a double murder in revenge: he used his and Oldacre's blood that was in storage to paint his house to look like a butcher's backroom. Is that what happened?"

"Yes."

"But why a *double* murder? And if Oldacre isn't dead and his son is being accused of murder, why isn't he coming forward to the police?"

" *That* is the question," said Sherlock, running his fingers over his lips. "Why bother staging his own death if Oldacre's death alone would suffice? In that matter, why is Oldacre going along with it, and hiding at the McFarlanes? The longer he waits, the more suspicious he looks, and the case against his son darkens."

The flat drowned in a brooding silence as everyone tried to think the reason why. It was rather comical to see his twin sons look so serious. Percy's brow was clouded and his arms were crossed in a rather pompous picture of deep thought. Ron's entire face scrunched in the effort, and Ginny was pulling at her hair. Harry stared vacantly at his bowl of porridge, and Hermione was muttering to herself. John, on the other hand, just quietly studied Sherlock.

"Could the will have anything to do with it?" asked John.

Sherlock ignored the suggestion and kept talking to himself, eyes closed.

"Or maybe it's the fact Oldacre is a gay man having a heterosexual affair," John speculated.

Sherlock's eyes suddenly lit up.

" *Oh*," he breathed. "Ooooh, that's brilliant, John, that's exactly it!"

He snatched up the phone again.

"Oldacre and Amberley. What are their affiliations?" A muted reply, "You anticipate me, Inspector. Chess player. LGBT alliance. Yes, it

makes perfect sense."

" *How?* " everyone asked almost at once.

"Amberley played a subtle game," said Sherlock, wriggling in approval. "Oldacre is a well-known and well-respected member of the LGBT community. If he came forward, his affair will go public and his reputation will shatter. If he *doesn't* come forward, his son is convicted. He loses either way. What does a man do when he has no winning options? Stay in a paralysis. It was very *clever* -and despicable." He added the last bit after receiving a hard glare from John. "But I believe Oldacre one-upped on him."

Everyone stared.

"Oldacre updated his will," Sherlock explained. "He must've suspected Amberley was up to something. He probably changed the heir from Amberley to McFarlane, so even if Amberley resurfaces, he won't get a penny. Think about it: if indeed the will was updated, then the only person who benefits from Oldacre's death is Oldacre himself: Amberley is foiled, Oldacre avoids a scandal, and he escapes his money problems. I won't be surprised if it was Oldacre who told McFarlane to flee the country. Again, McFarlane fleeing benefits Oldacre: People will continue to suspect McFarlane, which strengthens the case that he's dead."

Arthur felt winded as he took in the convoluted plot. Who would've thought a simple, straightforward looking case had so many subtle and evil motives behind it? And poor Mr. McFarlane, he would've been wrongfully arrested for murder if it weren't for Sherlock.

"So this is what you do," said Arthur in astonishment. "You solve crimes."

"Only interesting ones," said Sherlock dismissively, but Arthur could tell he was very pleased.

"And I blog about it," said John, with a mischievous smile, "Good job, you. That was fantastic. Very subtle bit of reasoning, that. You figured out most of it from the article, didn't you?"

"Of course," said Sherlock, preening.

John chuckled and took the fone from him.

"Inspector Gregory, this is John Watson. Yeah, hi. I'm pretty sure it occurred to you already, but if you want to avoid a big media storm that's not going to help you at all, you'll want to pursue the case from the anticoagulant angle. Handling that stuff isn't easy, and they aren't easy to come by unless you're involved the medical field. Uh-huh. So Amberley either stole it from a blood bank, which adds theft on top of arson, or he had an accomplice who knows how to draw and store blood. Oh, I'm sure you'll do fine. Sherlock said you're smarter than most."

"I did *not* !" Sherlock shouted, his previous good mood gone like morning dew.

"Oh, yeah," said John blithely, "He was impressed that you figured out there was enough blood splattered around to kill two people. Your data collection was very thorough. He said so: 'you anticipate me'."

"Just that once," Sherlock growled.

"Sure. Bam to you too," John ended the call. "There. That's wraps up the case nicely."

Sherlock, there was no other word for it, pouted like a ten-year-old. John clapped his back playfully before turning to the captivated audience.

"Sooo, zoo?" asked John, with a butter-can't-melt-in-my-mouth-why-would-you-think-of-such-a-thing expression.

Of course, by then the children had no interest in Muggle zoos. They wanted to know other cases Sherlock handled. John pulled up something called a blog-a self-published journal open for public reading from the sound of it-through the computer and started narrating a case titled: 'A Study in Pink'. It was the first case John and Sherlock handled together, and the case that forged their partnership.

"So there he was, all mysterious looking with his *cheekbones* and texting away on my phone, when out of the blue he asked: *Afghanistan or Iraq* ?"

The children sniggered. Arthur and Molly listen in rapt attention as John continued to narrate another demonstration of Sherlock's massive intellect and corresponding childishness-apparently Sherlock had *matured* since then, if the way he *stopped insulting the law enforcement to their faces* was any indication-by retelling how Sherlock deduced John's life story and solved the case of mysterious serial suicides that horrified Muggle London.

"So he got *everything* right?" asked Hermione breathlessly.

"Everything except for one small thing," said John, raising a finger. "Harry's short for Harriet."

The whole group except Harry (Potter) gasped.

"Harry's your *sister!* ?" Fred howled.

John laughed and nodded. Sherlock rolled his eyes.

"For god sake, I had fifty-fifty chance of getting the gender right," he grumbled.

"You could've just said *sibling* if you wanted to be politically and syntactically correct," John mocked fondly.

Sherlock scowled. John laughed and wrapped an arm around his shoulders in rough camaraderie. Arthur half-expected Sherlock to shove John away in a fit of childish pique, but he didn't. The scowl eventually faded into a one-sided smirk.

Arthur and Molly relaxed in the kitchen after John directed the children to play something called Mario Kart in the sitting room. Sherlock and John joined them after the children were completely absorbed in the game.

"So how did you two get married?" asked Molly.

Both John and Sherlock took a deep (and noisy) drink from their

respective mugs. Inexplicably, Arthur remembered something he observed from his raids and his Auror friends told him about interrogating suspects: the guilty ones often took long thirsty swigs from their cups before lying through their teeth.

"It just kind of happened," said John.

"Oh, come, marriage doesn't just *happen*," said Molly shrewdly.

Sherlock and John looked at each other.

"Tell us about yours and we'll tell you ours?" Sherlock said, sounding uncertain for the first time.

John looked sideways dubiously, but didn't object. The hemming and hawing fired Arthur's curiosity like no other. What kind of the story could it be that made John and Sherlock so reluctant to talk about it?

Molly took the deal in good faith.

"Well, we were in the middle of a war," she explained. "With You-Know-Who growing more powerful each day and people dying all time, everyone was eloping left, right and center. Arthur and I went ahead and got married right after leaving Hogwarts. We didn't see the point in waiting-we knew we were meant for each other."

"So you two dated at Hogwarts," said John.

"Oh yes," said Molly. Then she sat straighter in eager anticipation. "Now your turn! How did you get married? How did he propose? He was the one who proposed, wasn't he? Or did you? Your lot seems very liberal."

John choked. Sherlock added more sugar to his tea and started swirling the teaspoon with determination.

"Well, he popped question," John stuttered, "At, uh, Barts. In the same lab we first met, in fact."

"Oooooh… !" Molly crooned.

"It sounds more romantic than it actually was," John muttered.

" *What did he say?* " asked Molly, her eyes shining.

Sherlock turned completely stone-faced and John turned deeply red. For the first time, Arthur could see John really was a she, despite the unfortunate naming. John floundered, first mouthing: *'It was so embarrassing!'* before glaring at Sherlock, beseeching with a mouthed ' *Help me out here!* ', which Sherlock completely ignored. Finally, unable to bring herself to say it, John buried her face in her hands. Arthur wanted to let it go, but Molly kicked him savagely under the table.

"Context," Sherlock abruptly rumbled. "The Moriarty the cabbie mentioned in the taxi-driver case-he wanted to get rid of me. Not just dead, but *fallen:* my work and reputation ruined, and dead by my own hand."

Molly gasped and covered her mouth. Arthur gaped.

"How?"

"Moriarty set up a kidnapping case and made it look like *Sherlock* orchestrated it," said John quietly. "He also created a false identity: a jobbing actor called 'Richard Brooke'. Basically he tried to convince the world 'Moriarty' was an actor hired by Sherlock, who faked all the crimes he solved, and finally cooked up the idea of a consulting criminal to make himself look like a genius."

"Preposterous!" Arthur shouted.

Sherlock smirked, a wry twist of bitter self-deprecation.

"A story more palatable than the truth. The police eagerly embraced it. And there are always reporters hungry to publish a story as long as it sounds plausible. An expose article was scheduled for release right around that time."

"So what happened?" asked Arthur urgently. "I can see it was bad situation all around. But if Moriarty succeeded in his ploy, you wouldn't still be working with the police. Also, John, there is no way *you* would've taken in those lies. You've seen him work."

Sherlock smirked again. This time it looked fond.

"What is it that you said to me, John?" he said. "That night the Yard was preparing a warrant for my arrest. 'I know you're for real. No one could fake being such an annoying dick all the time'."

Arthur smiled while Molly was scandalized at the language. John turned pink and muttered: 'Army, thank you, and totally true.'

"So you realized you wanted to marry John when she proved to be the only person who really knew you and stood by your side to the end?" asked Arthur.

This time both Sherlock and John cringed. As Arthur listened to their synchronized groaning, he decided both had an anathema against anything overtly romantic. Arthur could understand. He knew people like that, and it fit Sherlock and John's general temperament.

"… More or less," John forced out behind a grimace.

Later that night, as Arthur flew his family back to the Burrow with Harry and Hermione in tow for their long-awaited visit to their home (minus Molly-she Apparated early to prepare the rooms), he asked Harry a question.

"John and Sherlock, they're not very romantic, are they?"

Harry made a face that eloquently said how the very idea was appalling.

"But they love each other very much?"

" *Yes*," said Harry with conviction-the kind of conviction that said he was asked that question quite often and usually with varying degrees of scepticism.

"How do you know?"

Harry grimaced. "I just do!" he cried.

Arthur smiled as he stirred the car above the clouds. He wasn't looking for specific reasons, really. Harry's reaction was good

enough.

Final Notes : I've never been more productive in writing all my life. I love Arthur Weasley. I want to be just like him when I grow up. The thesis went swimmingly with my advisor. Got top grades. Ha! Now I tantalize you with more information on John and Sherlock's marriage. For further clarification, the proposal happened right around the end of TRF, and marriage happened after that. You should also remember Lestrade was their witness :D

Braving the Alley

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Nineteen: Braving the Alley

Lestrade was having breakfast with his family when the owl came. He ruined his undershirt spewing tea when the tawny bird of prey - *which shouldn't even be about in daylight, wasn't that the whole point of owls!* ? - swooped in from their open window and dropped a heavy parchment envelope with a wax seal on the dining table.

"Bird! Bird!" chirped Rupert, pointing at the owl.

"Owl!" cried Martin, his eyes as wide as saucers. "Real *OWL* !"

Baby Elise burbled inside her playpen. Julia was the only one who didn't look excited, and the mail was addressed to her. Lestrade regarded at the envelope apprehensively. Ellen stared at it and wouldn't move from where she was cleaning up Rupert. At length both Lestrade and Ellen moved to reach out for it. They paused at the same time, hoping the other would get it. When neither of them did, Ellen sighed and took it herself.

Ellen made series of odd faces as she studied the purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter H.

" *Draco Dormiens Nunquam Titillandus*," said Ellen, reading the Latin motto on the bottom of the crest. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Lestrade moved and hovered over Ellen's shoulder. Julia crept silently next to her and stood on her tiptoes. The three of them read the letter together. Lestrade felt the need to sit down when he reached the second page, which listed the required school equipment.

"A wand," Lestrade repeated. "A freakin' *wand* . And a *cauldron* . Jesus."

"Potion kits and standard book of spells," Ellen said hollowly. "What even is this?"

Julia said nothing. She seemed to shrink into herself. Lestrade noticed and squared his shoulders. *Courage, Greg.*

" *Okay*," he said. "This is what we're gonna do. I'm gonna to call John and Ellen is going to talk to Jack. We'll figure out how to buy this stuff. If either objects, and my bet is on Sherlock, I'm publishing John's marriage story."

"That's mean," said Ellen, even as she betrayed her amusement by the twitching of her lips.

"Drastic prats require drastic measures," said Lestrade firmly.

Lestrade prepared for work afterwards. Julia and the kids were dropped off at Jackie's as usual, except Ellen and Elise joined them too, Ellen having decided to have a long talk with Jackie due to the exceptional circumstances. Lestrade brandished Julia's Hogwarts letter in lieu a greeting. Mr. Shin regarded the letter in wordless and mournful distaste before beckoning them inside. Jackie's twin brothers, Jeremy and Jason, were in the parlour. There was nothing noticeably different about the way they dressed or looked except they were holding long, polished wooden sticks.

"About time," said Jeremy, looking impeccable and effeminate as always as in his designer suit.

"Have you sent a reply yet?" asked Jason, who, unlike his twin, was in his perennial cargo trousers, raggy old t-shirt and black socks (*why* ?).

Lestrade double-checked the letter. Sure enough, there was an RSVP requirement written in the last paragraph.

"Didn't think so," said Jason lightly. "I'll shoot an Owl. It's a yes, right?"

"Yeah, sure," said Lestrade, shaking his head. " *Owls* . In the freakin' broad daylight. Not very discreet, innit?"

"Don't give me that look, it's what British Magicals use," grumbled Jeremy. "We use ravens or magpies in SK."

"Use a bloody dodo if you have to. Just do it," growled Lestrade.

"Actually, dodos are a magical bird called diricawl-" said Jackie, whilst gliding into the parlour.

Lestrade closed his eyes and covered his face. "Fatal Error: System overloaded. Shutting down."

Jeremy and Jason chuckled and Jackie smiled benignly as she guided Ellen into the airy living room.

"I'll call you later," said Jackie. "Please reboot yourself by then."

"I make no promises," said Lestrade. Then he left.

He went through the day distracted and out-of-sorts. Criminals kept doing irritatingly illegal things throughout London, and people kept getting killed in fits of passion or stupidity. Lestrade vowed if he had to dig out an abandoned baby in a skip and find whoever did this ever again, he was going to consider early retirement or a career change, and he meant it this time. The nadir moment was calling John in the men's toilet between meetings, asking where the bloody heck is he supposed go buy a fecking cauldron in London.

"You have to go to the Leaky Cauldron," said John.

"Are you talking about the pub in Charing Cross?" Lestrade asked in unadvisedly loud volumes, "I've been going there on-and-off for *years* . Don't tell me I can order a cauldron with a side of fish and chips."

John was silent for a moment.

"I'll meet you there next Wednesday," said John, and then hung up.

Lestrade left his stall muttering a bane upon John Watson's head and found Anderson standing before a urinal. They stared at each other for a long awkward moment.

"Secret code?" Anderson guessed.

"I neither confirm nor deny," Lestrade evaded.

Anderson pulled a face. "Must be nice to have a Harem."

Unable to think an answer for that comment, Lestrade just returned to his office. He should've realised Anderson speculating his love life would inevitably lead to Donovan hearing about it, which in turn meant everyone in Serious Crimes would know in twenty-four minutes. After Gregson ragged him about the unspeakable things he was doing with Scotland Yard's pain-in-the-backside's better-half, Lestrade gave in and bought two sugared doughnuts from the nearby corner shop and washed them down with a large overpriced, over-sugared latte from Starbucks.

He was leaning back into his chair feeling disgusting and obese when someone knocked at his office door. He didn't recognise him-one of the uniforms, perhaps?

"Hello," he said, a tad awkwardly. "Mind if I interrupt?"

Lestrade shook his head, bewildered. Unknown shut his office door behind him.

"Got a phone call from Dr. Watson," said Unknown quietly. "I'm Alfred Thomas… my step-son goes to Hogwarts."

Tremendous relief spread inside Lestrade's chest. He decided the

next time he saw John, he was going kiss her on the mouth. After spending the precautionary amount of Serious Discussion time, Lestrade and Alfred went out for a break and bonded.

"How do you deal with this?" Lestrade grumbled.

"Hell if I know," Alfred grumbled back. "When I married Gracie, Dean came as part of the package. I didn't even know something was different about him until the deputy headmistress visited us in person. If someone asks, I tell them Dean got a scholarship to go to a boarding school up in Scotland and wiggle my eyebrows suggestively." As if to demonstrate, Alfred wiggled his eyebrows - they moved like anorexic caterpillars that suffered a stroke.

"Mine got hers from her mum," said Lestrade. "Do you suppose people would believe me if I said her family is paying for her education?"

"That should be fine," said Alfred. "Got any others kids?"

"Two sons and a baby girl; they're half-siblings."

"Might have a bit of trouble with jealousy," Alfred warned. "None of the kids I had with Gracie has the gift, and they're dead-envious of Dean. We had to break a few fights and really put the foot down on the teasing."

Lestrade filed that in his head. "Right."

They moved to the topic of school costs. Lestrade winced at the amount Alfred had to spend to buy everything last year, and winced even more when Alfred moaned about wizards not taking credit cards.

"Have you seen the booklist?" Alfred complained. "A whole set of new books just for one class! They better be worth it…"

Lestrade remembered the books by Gilderoy Lockhart and let out a soul-wrenching sigh.

"Don't you get a feeling it's going to one of THOSE classes? You know, the ones where the teacher makes the students buy all his

books?"

They grumbled some more. Then, after promising each other to go out for drinks, Lestrade returned to the bullpen. Roger Bradstreet intercepted him on the way.

"Why were you talking to Al from Traffic?"

Lestrade decided to stick to the truth.

"His kid goes to the same boarding school Julia got accepted to. We did an info swap."

Roger's hairline went up, "Since when were you planning to send your kid to boarding school?"

"Not my idea. Her grandpa's arranging everything."

"Is that right?" said Roger. "How are you going to pay for it? Or is he paying?"

"Scholarship," said Lestrade, the lies coming quite easily since that talk with Alfred. "Julia's very bright you know. She made it to the bonus round in the Primary Maths Challenge last February." His proud smile faded a bit when he remembered Hogwarts didn't offer Maths in their curriculum. Blast.

"Good thing she didn't get your brains, yeah?" grinned Roger.

"I say that all the time," Lestrade agreed.

Wednesday dawned too early for Lestrade's peace of mind. Lestrade finished his half-day late (as usual), so he phoned Jack to tell her that he would meet them at the Leaky Cauldron. Jack said ooookaaaaay.

"What's wrong?" asked Lestrade.

"Jeremy and Jason want to take magical transport as part of the orientation," Jackie explained. "I find magical transport unpleasant."

"Can't you guys take the bus?" Lestrade asked.

"There's nothing wrong with Floo!" Jeremy shouted in the background.

"And it's so much cheaper!" Jason hollered.

Jackie let out a little sigh. "Julia, darling, don't cling to me like that. My hand is going numb."

"Daddy, I want to take the bus," Julia whined.

"Julia, you can't do anything without taking risks," Jason chided.

"I'll take them when I get there," Julia muttered.

"Not with that kind of attitude, you won't," said Jeremy. "Now just follow my example."

Jackie let out another sigh. "I'll see you there?"

"If something goes wrong, I'm going to kill your brothers," said Lestrade seriously. "You'll never find the bodies. You'll just have to hold the funeral with empty caskets."

"Sure, go ahead," said Jackie lightly, as if Lestrade didn't threaten premeditated murder. Then she ended the call.

Lestrade arrived at the Leaky Cauldron in a few minutes. He found his father-in-law at the huge fireside with his hands clasped behind his back. He was as expressionless as always and looked quite distinguishing in his linen three-piece suit. Jeremy and Jason were there, too, in their usual attire, and they were staring impatiently at the burning flames like they were waiting for Father Christmas to drop down the chimney or something.

Suddenly the small orange fire turned green and as tall as a person, and Jackie stumbled out of the flames.

"Wait, weren't you going to send Julia first?" asked Jason as he caught his sister.

Lestrade stopped his instinctive blue-streak as fear overtook his veins.

" *Whad'ya mean, you sent her first?* ! *Where's Julia!* ?" he roared.

Jeremy looked uneasy. "Uh… maybe she went one grate too far?"

Fear turned into panic.

"THE RIGHT *WHAT!* ? WHAT THE F- IS GOING ON?!"

A few people gasped at his language. Lestrade didn't care. Jason made placating gestures.

"Wizards travel via fireplaces with this thing called Floo powder," Jason explained. "You throw the stuff into the fire, speak your destination, step into the fire and you get there. This is Julia's first time, so she might have got out of the wrong fireplace. You know, like getting off the wrong bus stop. Nuna, did she speak clearly?"

Jackie finally got to her feet, still looking rather ashen. "She *stuttered.* "

Jeremy and Jason looked stricken. Lestrade whipped out his phone to call Julia. He yelped when he found it was leaking smoke. His stomach churning, blood running cold and heart galloping, Lestrade turned around to run out to the streets.

Mr. Shin slapped a sheet of paper on his stomach and suddenly Lestrade was unable to move. Then Mr. Shin said something harsh-sounding to his sons in his native tongue. Jason and Jeremy, who were at least a foot taller than their tiny father, cowered as he berated them at length.

"He says: you two are idiots, I can't believe you came out of my loins, and if we don't find my granddaughter in an hour, I'm going to eviscerate you," translated Jackie helpfully. Lestrade would've clapped if he could move or was less hysterical.

Several patrons rose up and offered to go look for poor Julia. Tom, the barkeep, said he'd make some fire-calls (what was that?) and alert his fellow shopkeepers to keep an eye out. Meanwhile, Mr. Shin pulled out a wad of rice paper. He made an imperious gesture over them, and immediately the sheets hold themselves into aeroplanes in mid-air. The aeroplanes then flew out the bar through

a backdoor like a flock of attacking birds.

"Tracking spell," said Mr. Shin flatly. "When they find her, they will show me where she is."

Only then did Mr. Shin remove the sheet of paper on Lestrade. Lestrade felt the paralysis leave him and he almost concussed himself as he collapsed to the floor. Jackie ushered him to a chair. Tom immediately came over with a cup of tea.

"Or would you like something stronger?" asked Tom as he handed the cup over.

"Don't give it to him," said a voice that made Lestrade want to scream. "He has a bad history with whiskey."

Sherlock sauntered into view, followed by John and Harry. Lestrade grit his teeth to prevent himself from saying what he wanted to do to Sherlock in extremely graphic terms.

"That would be highly ambitious of you," said Sherlock haughtily to his unspoken words.

" *Marriage story*," Lestrade threatened. "I'm going to do it."

"You wouldn't dare," Sherlock growled.

"Girls, calm down," said John. "What's going on? What happened?"

Jackie explained the situation. Lestrade noticed his father-in-law didn't spare a glance at the new arrivals and just waited for his enchanted paper aeroplanes to alert him back or whatever, remaining calm, expressionless and at a soldierly rest. It made Lestrade want to salute.

"Floo powder," John muttered darkly. "Nasty stuff. Felt like I was spinning down a drain the last time I tried."

"You used the Floo network?" asked Jackie, sounding surprised.

"Yeah. Had to pick up Harry from his friend's house. Worse than side-along Apparition, and that was pretty bad too."

Suddenly Mr. Shin made a minute move-like a tiger picking a scent of potential prey.

"Masks; blood-covered playing cards; a withered hand; a black cabinet and a large stone fireplace," he muttered, staring at the darkness. "I have not seen this place before."

Harry looked alert. "I think I know where it is."

Lestrade was on him in an instant. "Take me there."

John grabbed his shoulder.

"Let Harry take care of it. Magic isn't something you approach half-cocked."

Lestrade glared. "You can't tell me to-"

"Don't go, Greg," said Mr. Shin quietly. "There are many things that you do not yet understand, but believe me, I will not allow evil to befall on my granddaughter if I can help it, nor to you." To Harry, he said, "Go. My talisman will protect you."

Mr. Shin flicked another sheet of rice paper and it neatly folded itself into a butterfly. It flapped to Harry's shoulder and rested there, its delicate paper wings fluttering. Harry nodded and made his way to the backdoor. Lestrade fretted as the small, black-haired figure wearing a tweed jacket, short trousers and navy-blue keds vanished.

"I can't just-" said Lestrade, unable to take it anymore.

"Do not me make me do this again," said Mr. Shin, waving the rice paper he'd slapped on Lestrade earlier in a threatening way. "I will do it if it means you will not charge blindly to harm."

Lestrade calculated the odds of him ducking around his father-in-law and catching up on Harry. Apparently sensing his thoughts, Mr. Shin furrowed his long, thin eyebrows.

"It will follow after you like a homing missile," he warned.

Lestrade slumped back into his chair and covered his face. Traitors.

Vipers the whole lot of them.

Harry ducked into a narrow cul-de-sac hidden behind several wooden crates at the edge of Diagon Alley and wrapped his invisibility cloak around him (Harry never left without it, not since Sherlock used it to break into the Bank of England). When he emerged, a few cautionary minutes later, Harry quietly made his way to the sparsely lit streets in the opposite direction of Gringotts Bank. It got darker and dingier as Harry walked further in. He checked the old wooden street sign hanging above a shop selling poisonous candles. It said Knockturn Alley.

Harry walked heel-toe and kept his glance firmly forward. He passed two shabby-looking wizards muttering to each other from the shadow of a doorway, and an aged witch carrying a tray of human fingernails. He recognised the shop that had a cage full of live, gigantic black spiders. Further down the alleyway was the largest shop in the area: *Borgin and Burkes* . The butterfly on Harry's shoulder tapped his cheek. Harry nodded, approached the shop's window and peered through the glass.

It was hard to make out anything inside the dimly lit shop. The human bones on the counter looked eerie in its bleached whiteness. Harry almost let out a gasp when the staring glass eye swivelled towards his direction. A magnificent necklace of opals glittered under the single lit candle. He skimmed over the large black cabinet next to the necklace's showcase to examine the table that had a hangman's noose. Then he doubled back. The cabinet door was open a sliver and a paper aeroplane was waving a wing at the opening.

Harry took a deep breath. He had to enter the shop, but there was a bell on top of the door designed to alert the owners of any customers entering. Harry wondered if he should risk a freezing charm, but then the paper aeroplane at the cabinet flew to the top of the door and wrapped itself around the bell's clapper.

" *Neat*," Harry whispered.

He opened the door, and silently crept to the cabinet while keeping an eye on the counter. No one came out of the back room. Harry heard muffled sobbing coming out of the cabinet. He reached out to touch the handle. A hitched gasp filtered out when Harry's disembodied hand emerged from the folds of his cloak. Harry removed his cloak with his left hand and opened the cabinet door.

He found a little girl covered in soot inside. Her dark hair was tied up in a ponytail, and she was wearing red football shorts with white boarders, a pale T-shirt with a broad horizontal green stripe across the chest and sleeves, and yellow converses. She was crouching in fetal position in the corner and was peering at Harry over her knees. Her large chocolate-brown eyes were enormous, and looked exactly like Mr. Lestrade's.

"Don't be afraid," Harry whispered, leaning forward. "I'm here to help you."

The girl shook her head frantically. She looked terrified and there were dirty tear tracks on both of her cheeks.

Harry reached out. "C'mon," he said encouragingly. "I can take you back to your family."

The girl slapped his hand away and cowered further into the corner. Then she looked back when the paper butterfly fluttered over and touched her hand.

Harry waited for her to take in the butterfly, which calmly flapping its wings.

"See? I'm not a bad person," said Harry, smiling.

He reached out his hand again. This time, the girl tentatively reached back. Her hands were cold and clammy when Harry grasped them.

"Where's Daddy and Aunt Jackie?" the girl asked as she unfolded herself from the corner, trembling all over.

"There're a bit further away," said Harry.

Harry checked the door. There were two people at the other side of the glass, and one of them was the very last person Harry wanted to meet in the middle of the Borgin and Burkes, holding hands with a strange girl: Draco Malfoy.

" *Hide* !" Harry hissed.

He quickly shot inside the cabinet, pushing the girl back into the corner, and wrapped his invisibility cloak around them. He reached back and closed the cabinet doors, but left a small crack to peer through. Seconds later, the bell clanged, and Malfoy stepped into the shop. Draco's father followed him shortly. Mr. Malfoy crossed the shop, looking lazily at the items on display, and rang a bell on the counter before turning to his son and saying, "Touch nothing, Draco."

"I thought you were going to buy me a present," said Malfoy, who had reached for a glass eye.

"I said I would buy you a racing broom," said Mr. Malfoy, drumming his fingers on the counter.

"What's the point of that if I'm not on the House team?" said Malfoy, looking sulky and bad-tempered. "Harry Potter got a Nimbus last year and special permission from Dumbledore so he could play for Gryffindor. He's not even that good, it's just because he's *famous*… famous for having a stupid scar on his forehead…"

Malfoy bent down to examine a shelf full of skulls.

"… everyone thinks he's so *clever* ; *wonderful* Potter with his *scar* and his *phone* and his *broomstick* -"

"You told me this at least a dozen times already," said Mr. Malfoy, with a quelling look at his son. "And I would remind you that it is not-*prudent* -to appear less than fond of Harry Potter, not when most of our kind regard him as the hero who made the Dark Lord disappear-ah, Mr. Borgin."

A stooping man appeared behind the counter, smoothing his greasy hair back from his face.

"Mr. Malfoy, what a pleasure to see you again," said Mr. Borgin in a voice as oily as his hair. "Delighted-and young Master Malfoy, too!-charmed. How may I be of assistance?"

This was a familiar conversation to Harry. He'd heard one very much like it the first time he used Floo powder to go back home after meeting up with Neville at Halifax. He accidentally ended up in a shop in Knockturn Alley instead of the Leaky Cauldron. After he left the shop, which was full of iron-bar cages holding very sinister looking creatures, and looked around to find his way out, Harry noticed a man who could only be Draco's father in front of Borgin and Burkes: he had the same pale, pointed face and identical cold grey eyes. Harry overheard Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Burke haggling over something from the tiny break between two shops, which was where he hid himself. Harry later used Borgin and Burke's large stone fireplace to floo himself to the Leaky Cauldron. He kicked himself for it afterwards because Diagon Alley was only a ten minute walk away.

Suddenly Harry realised Mr. Malfoy wasn't buying anything this time, but selling.

"Selling?" said Mr. Borgin. The smile faded slightly from his face.

"You have heard, of course, that the Ministry of Magic is conducting more raids," said Mr. Malfoy, unfurling a roll of parchment. "I have a few-ah-items at home that might embarrass me, if the Ministry were to call…"

"The Ministry wouldn't presume to trouble you, sir, surely?"

Mr. Malfoy's lip curled.

"I have not been visited yet. The name Malfoy still commands a certain respect, yet the Ministry grows ever more meddlesome. The rumours of a new Muggle Protection Act persist. No doubt that flea-bitten, Muggle-loving fool Arthur Weasley is behind it-"

Another familiar vein; Harry felt the same hot surge of anger. He felt the girl shudder against his chest.

"-and as you see, some of these poisons might make it *appear* -"

"I understand, sir, of course," said Mr. Borgin. "Let me see…"

"Can I have *that* ?" Draco interrupted, pointing the withered hand on the cushion.

"Ah, the Hand of Glory!" said Mr. Borgin, abandoning Mr. Malfoy's list and scurrying over to Draco. "Insert a candle and it gives light only to the beholder! Best friend of thieves and plunderers! Your son has fine taste, sir."

"I hope my son will amount to more than a thief and a plunderer, Borgin," said Mr. Malfoy coldly, and Mr. Borgin quickly backtracked, "No offence, sir, no offence meant-"

"Though if his grades don't pick up, that may indeed be all he is fit for," said Mr. Malfoy more coldly still.

"It's not my fault," retorted Draco. "The teachers all have favourites, that Hermione Granger-"

"I would have thought you'd be ashamed that a girl of no wizard family beat you in every exam," snapped Mr. Malfoy.

Harry was pleased to see Draco look both abashed and angry.

"It's the same all over," said Mr. Borgin in his oily voice. "Wizard blood is counting for less everywhere."

"Not with me," said Mr. Malfoy, his long nostrils flaring.

"No, sir, not with me, either," said Mr. Borgin, with a deep bow.

"In that case, perhaps we can return to my list. I am in something of a hurry, Borgin. I have important business elsewhere today-"

They started to haggle. Harry watched nervously as Draco examined the objects for sale, getting ever so closer to the cabinet. Harry wrapped the invisibility cloak more securely around them as Draco turned away from the glass cases and stood before the cabinet. The girl started breathing in short, hissing jets as Draco

stretched out his hand for the handle-

"Done," said Mr. Malfoy. "Come, Draco."

Harry slowly let out the breath he was holding as Draco turned away. The girl let out a small whimper.

"Good day to you, Mr. Borgin. I'll expect you at the manor tomorrow to pick up the goods."

They left. The moment the door had closed, Mr. Borgin dropped his oily manner.

"Good day yourself, *Mister* Malfoy, and if the stories are true, you haven't sold half of what's hidden in your *manor*…"

Muttering darkly, Mr. Borgin disappeared into a back room. Harry waited for a minute in case he came back. Then, quietly as he could, he opened the door again and slipped out of the cabinet, holding the girl's hand. Harry draped the cloak over and around them, walked across the inside displays and out of the shop door. Again, the paper aeroplane from earlier held onto the clapper to prevent the bell from ringing.

The two of them walked quietly down the dingy alleyway, Harry in the lead. The girl clutched Harry's arm painfully as they walked pass the shops, one of which had a nasty window display of shrunken heads.

"Scared," she mumbled.

"We're fine," said Harry in a low voice. "We just have to be quiet. This cloak makes us invisible but not silent."

They trotted down the twisting street. A streetlight buzzed overhead. The sound of scurrying feet made the girl flinch. Harry kept his eyes fixed on the spot of sunlight gleaming above the rooftops.

"Almost there," Harry said encouragingly when the girl stumbled.

But the girl just kept digging her fingernails into Harry's arm. Harry lowered his line of sight a bit and felt his heart leap when he saw the

massive form of Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper. He strode towards them, his beetle-black eyes half-hidden under his thick, stormy eyebrows and his great bristling beard.

"That's Hagrid," said Harry quietly. "He's okay."

Hagrid, of course, couldn't see them. Harry wanted to say hello, but he didn't think removing his cloak would be wise. So he moved out of the way and stood with his back against a building wall, the girl standing next to him. Hagrid walked pass, growling under his breath: "Aren' there *any* shops aroun' here sellin' Flesh-Eatin' Slug Repellent?" Harry resumed their trek back to Diagon Alley after Hagrid disappeared behind a turn.

In a few minutes, they were in Diagon Alley. Harry led the girl behind the wooden crates from earlier and threw off the cloak.

"Here we are," he said.

The girl just stood looking scared and lost. Harry took out his wand from his inner jacket pocket and whispered, " *Scourgify.* "

The soot clinging to their clothes vanished. Harry carefully folded his invisibility cloak and stashed it and his wand back inside his jacket. Then he turned to the girl.

"Sorry," she said suddenly. "I made a noise."

Harry smiled, "It's okay, Julia, you did well."

He pointed the brightly lit streets beyond the wooden crates.

"If you go down that street facing the white marble building," Harry explained, "you'll find the stone archway to the Leaky Cauldron on your left. Your Dad and your family are there."

"How do you know my name?"

Harry blinked. Didn't she remember seeing him at the bowling alley? But then, Harry supposed, Julia Lestrade probably had more important things to pay attention to than a scrawny little boy with messy black hair when her family reunited and reconciled after a

huge freak-out over magic.

"I met you before," said Harry. "And I know your dad. You have his eyes, you know."

Julia blushed. Then, as if on cue, a familiar rusty-sounding voice rang out from a distance.

" *JULIA* !"

"You better go," said Harry. "I'll see you at Hogwarts. My name is Harry."

Julia took a step forward, stumbled over a loose cobblestone, and clumsily navigated around the crates. She gave Harry one last look, then quickly darted into the street.

Harry watched Julia run to the three tall men sprinting towards her. Then, remembering he'd promised to meet Ron and Hermione at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour around this time, Harry went on his own way. But not before sending John a text.

Found her. Now heading to Fortescue's

Good job. See you there. JW

Lestrade swept Julia into his embrace and held her tightly. Once he was sure she wasn't going to vanish, the world was right-side up and he was breathing like a normal human being, Lestrade stopped trying to crush her to death.

"Ohmygosh," he breathed. "Never again. Never, ever again. We're going to take the bus or the car, or a bloody donkey if need be, but never Floo powder. And I'm going to throw your uncles in front of a speeding train, I mean it."

Julia nodded fervently against his shoulder. She refused to let go of him when he put her down. She did, though, look around.

"Where is Harry?" she asked.

Lestrade looked around too. The boy was nowhere to be found.

"He's meeting up his friends," said John, seemingly rematerializing out of the ether. "They're getting ice cream."

Lestrade frowned. "You're not worried?"

"Should I be?" asked John, sounding honestly puzzled.

Lestrade sighed. He supposed it was different for John and Sherlock, who didn't raise Harry from infancy. The things they allowed Harry do sometimes made his heart stop.

"Oh, fine," he grumbled. "So where do we start?"

"Robes," said Jeremy. He was closely followed by Jason, Jackie and their father.

"I'd start with the books," said Jason.

"I don't want to hear from soon-to-be dead men," Lestrade growled.

"Sorry Greg," said the Shin twins, sounding truly regretful. "Sorry Julia."

Julia snuck closer to Lestrade and mumbled: "It's okay."

"Money exchange first," said John. "Wizards have their own currency, and shops here don't take Muggle money, as they call it, even when they have a Bank right down the street."

"Does the bank take card?" asked Lestrade nervously. He forgot to go to the ATM, and he didn't have a lot of cash.

"Electronics and Magic generally don't mix," said Jacqueline gently. "If you like, you can use Jeremy's old spell books and Jason's old school equipment. They're practically new anyway."

"Hey!" the twins protested.

"Why didn't you say so earlier?" Lestrade exclaimed. "Great. So just the robes, potion ingredients, quills, parchment and the wand. Why

quills, by the way? Can't she use biros?"

"I honestly have no good explanation for the quills," said Jeremy. "Parchment is good for spells, so they have their place. But for note-taking, just stick to regular paper. Most teachers don't mind. Just make sure you use parchment for homework, Julia. The teachers are mind-bogglingly strict about that."

"You can use biros and pencils for note-taking," said Jason. "But you'll have to practice quill writing. For exams, the teachers make the students use special quills. They don't accept anything else."

"Would've been nice to know this when we went shopping last year," sighed John. "Parchment costs really add up."

"I *knoooow*," said Jason empathically. "And let's not even talk about the wand, okay? I understand why, but *seriously* ."

"How much are we talking about?" Lestrade asked, dreading the answer.

"I paid seventeen Galleons for Harry's," said John. "That's around eighty-five pounds."

Lestrade tried not to let his draw drop. Christ.

"That's almost double the price of what we had to pay for!" said Jason, outraged.

"Mr. Ollivander said it's more difficult to find the right materials these days," said John, "Shrinking habitat and all that. I supposed there's a bit of brand pricing involved too-Ollivander is considered the best in the business."

"That's actually true," said Jeremy. "He *is* the best."

Jackie, who had been quietly watching them all, turned to Lestrade.

"Greg, you have all of Cecilia's old things, don't you?" she asked.

"Yeah…" said Lestrade guardedly.

"Go through them. You might find her old wand."

Enormous, glorious relief swept over Lestrade.

"Oh, that would be *great*," he said fervently. "What should I be looking for? Anything that looks like a wooden stick?"

"Date wood and dragon heartstring, twelve inches," said Mr. Shin. "The heartstring was taken from a well-aged Oriental Dragon-its scales had turned gold from its initial red."

Lestrade was fascinated. "What about Harry's wand?"

"Holly and Phoenix feather, eleven and a half inches, nice and supple," said John promptly.

"Nice," said Lestrade. Then he remembered something. "Uh, sir, why don't *you* have one?"

"Yeah, I was wondering about that," said John.

Mr. Shin didn't reply immediately. He stopped for a moment, and his unreadable expression turned mournful.

"… Wands as you know them are unique to Europe," he said eventually. "Where I come from things are very different."

"How different?" John asked.

Mr. Shin didn't answer. In the end he just walked away. His children, grandchild, Lestrade, and John watched him go.

"He's like that sometimes," said Jeremy.

"More so since Mum passed away. He doesn't even smile these days," agreed Jason.

"He misses her," said Jackie. "He was like that when *my* mother died. He only started smiling again when he met Shizuka."

"Didn't know you guys were half-siblings," said Lestrade. He'd only known one late and deeply lamented Mrs. Shin all his life.

"Cecilia and I were born from his first marriage," explained Jackie. "Jason and Jeremy came twelve years later. Finally the sons he wanted."

"Hellooooooo," Jeremy protested. "You're his favourite, nuna."

"I am *not*," Jackie denied.

" *Liar* !" shouted Jason.

"Meet you in an hour at Flourish and Blotts?" John said while the Shin siblings squabbled.

"Sure," said Lestrade. "Go. Shoo. Find your husband. He's probably doing something that'll get himself arrested."

John saluted and took off. Lestrade turned to the school list. They should be okay now. Nothing could possibly go more wrong.

"What did I say about not offending people who can turn you into a toad?" growled John after the promised hour.

John-Sherlock-and-Harry, Harry's friends and their families, Lestrade and his extended family, and Hagrid were all in the Leaky Cauldron. The Grangers were shaking with fright. The Weasleys were in various states of fury, elation, disapproval or worry. Sherlock, who was slouched in a wooden chair, kept massaging his temples looking dazed and confused. He'd been like that since an unknown spell hit him squarely in the face at the book store.

"I can't remember," he said. "This is not possible. I don't forget things unless I delete them."

John looked concerned in an instant. "What do you remember?"

"We met up Harry at that Ice Cream place," said Sherlock, frowning. "Got parchment and quills. Then we headed to Flourish and Blotts. There was a book-signing going on."

"So far so good," said John.

"That Lockhart character," Sherlock muttered. " *Year with a Yeti*, he couldn't have written it. Or rather, he couldn't have done what was written in it. He-"

"Yes, you made a twa- insulting comment about his skin not matching a person who supposedly spent a year in the Himalayas. Not enough tan you said."

"He could've lost the tan," Hermione Granger argued. Mrs. Weasley nodded furiously.

"After spending a year as close to the sun as terrestrially possible with all that snow reflecting UV light? Doubtful," Sherlock sneered. "Not to mention it's *obvious* the man hardly ever left the country. Just look at his pampered skin and manicured fingers. He's a *fake* ."

Sherlock spat out the last word like a curse. Harry, Ron and Hermione, John and Lestrade didn't even blinked at his breathtakingly rude deductions, as they were very much used to it. The rest of the Weasleys and Grangers, who weren't used to it, stared at Sherlock as though they couldn't believe someone like him existed. The Shin family were too stoic to express anything. Hagrid, on the other hand, snorted in agreement, which apparently surprised the children.

"… Moving on," sighed John. "What else do you remember?"

"Impromptu photo-shoot. Enter Malfoys," said Sherlock. Then in a terrifyingly accurate imitation of Lucius Malfoy, he said: " 'Well, well, well-Arthur Weasley.'"

Mr. Weasley turned dark red in remembrance.

"Insult. Insult. Insult," Sherlock went on, flapping his hands about like he was tapping invisible buttons. "Arthur, you threw a cauldron at him. Hagrid, you pulled them apart. John, I believe you twisted Lucius Malfoy's arm behind his back and dropped him to his knees."

"Oh, you remembered that part," said John mildly.

"That was so cool!" Fred shouted.

"Can you teach us?" Ron pleaded.

"Sorry," said John. "You guys are a bit too young."

"Awwww… !" the younger Weasley children whined.

"Not worried about assault charges?" asked Lestrade, grinning.

"Who's going to believe him?" John scoffed. "I'm just a lowly common Muggle. And I wear a cardigan."

All the Weasleys except Percy and Mrs. Weasley, plus Jeremy and Jason, roared with laughter. Hagrid chuckled a bit before turning serious.

"Yeh should've ignored him, John," said Hagrid, "I expect Lucius Malfoy would start plotting ter get back at yeh. They're rotten to the core, the whole family, everyone knows that. No Malfoy's worth listenin' ter-bad blood, that's what it is."

"Oh, the irony," said Sherlock, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"So is that it?" asked John. "You remember none of the specifics? Just a vague sense that insults were being thrown? No crystal clear memory of the exact wording and tone and gestures as you normally do?"

"Of course I remember that," snapped Sherlock irritably. Then he stood up and demonstrated- accurately mimicking the way Malfoy Sr. reached down and extracted Ginny Weasley's very old, very battered copy of *A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration* from her cauldron and reciting Malfoy Sr.'s words exactly in the same tone he used. He even roped Arthur Weasley to do his cauldron throwing attack at him, so he could complete Mr. Malfoy's final insult of thrusting the Transfiguration book to Ginny with the malicious comment that it was best her father could do for her.

"I don't know if I should admire your acting or punch you in face for embarrassing Arthur," said John when Sherlock was done. "Thank you humouring my idiot husband, Arthur."

Mr. Weasley was still very red when he mumbled it was fine.

"Seems like your memory is fine to me," John remarked. "That's exactly how I remember it too. Well. Except you bending down to check Ginny's Cauldron, but you remember that don't you?"

"Obviously, but there's a GAP!" shouted Sherlock, lashing out. "There's a gap in my short-term storage and I can't figure out what it is! God, is this how it is for you ordinary people? It's *intolerable!* "

"Welcome to the club," Lestrade muttered.

"Definitely a memory charm?" John asked to Mr. Weasley, while Sherlock started to pace.

"Looks like it," said Mr. Weasley, frowning. "Placidity and inability to focus are common symptoms of a person whose memory has been modified. I'm actually surprised Sherlock is aware he forgot something-a successful memory charm would've taken care of that."

"No one but his older brother beats him when it comes to keeping his mind organised," said John. "Can you lift it?"

"Sorry John," Mr. Weasley apologised. "Removing the charm might actually harm him more."

John instantly turned expressionless. Lestrade knew the look-John was feeling murderous.

"I don't like this," John said flatly. "Why would someone put a memory charm on him? In the middle of Diagon Alley where there's plenty of people to see? I know you lot are pretty liberal about the memory charms, but we fall in the grey area. Plus, as far as we know, Sherlock didn't see anything that would breach your statute of secrecy."

"I don't know, and that troubles me too," said Mr. Weasley. "I'll look into this, John, I promise."

Everyone got ready to go home afterwards. Lestrade thanked Jackie again for keeping her twin brothers' spell books and school equipment in storage. They'd left Hogwarts three years ago, so their old spellbooks were still the correct editions.

"And I'll definitely look for Cecilia's old wand," said Lestrade. "I'm still can't believe they're so expensive."

"It is one of the most important things for a Magic person to have," said Jackie blandly.

"And Ollivander is the best in the business," said Jeremy. "He's worth every penny, Greg."

Lestrade just grunted. How was he supposed to know?

"You know…" said Jason carefully, like he was negotiating difficult terrain, "We don't mind paying for-"

"Nah, it's okay, you've done enough," said Lestrade. "Nice meeting all of you."

He left with Julia. Lestrade kept a cheerful conversation going, saying how nice it was to meet other young witches going to Hogwarts, Hermione Granger sounded quite clever and didn't Ginny Weasley seem nice? Julia nodded noncommittally, but that was fine. If Juila really didn't want to go she'd say so.

"Is Harry famous?" Julia wondered out loud.

Lestrade wondered about that too. The way Lockhart and the press reacted definitely implied this. The Baker street prats said nothing of the sort, but that was to be expected. But his magical in-laws refused to comment even when he pressed.

"Guess we'll just have to find out," said Lestrade. "Chin up and don't give up, yeah?"

Final Notes : I know PS stated Harry paid seven Galleons for his wand. But this is an AU shoved about twenty years into the future. What with the shrinking habitat due to pollution and overpopulation, and consequent lack of wand-worthy trees and magical cores, Mr. Ollivander is having a hard time finding the right materials. Hence the price increase.

Substitution and Scandal

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty: Substitution and Scandal

"This has to be some kind of record," drawled Severus at the staff room. "A Hogwarts teacher is sacked before he can even get started."

Minerva felt a headache building as she read the *Daily Prophet* article that brought the malicious comment about: *Gilderoy Lockhart accused as fraud at his own book signing event for his autobiography* Magical Me*…*

"Of course Mr. Holmes was behind it," Minerva muttered, shying away from the more… unkind description that rose up along with that statement. She had an auditory flashback of Mr. Holmes speaking as she read the cruel observations and incisive reasoning a 'Mysterious Muggle' fired off the moment he spotted Lockhart at Flourish and Blotts. Minerva wasn't sure if he was quoted word-by-word, but she was certain the writer got the gist of it. It was written by Gwendolyn K. Muggeridge; Minerva remembered her as a quick-witted writer who could produce scrolls of articulate paragraphs in the quarter of the time it took others to write one without even the aid of a quick-quotes quill.

Minerva set the paper down and massaged her temples. She had

the uncharitable thought if only Mr. Holmes triggered the (inevitable) scandal a month earlier he would've saved them a lot of trouble. She had been present at Lockhart's interview, and within two minutes Minerva couldn't help but let out a sigh as she imagined a year with Gilderoy Lockhart as a colleague. But no, Mr. Holmes would never be so convenient or thoughtful. The booklists were already mailed out, Hogwarts was again lacking a Defence Against the Dark Arts Teacher, and the term was going to start in a couple of weeks.

"So what are we going to do?" asked Filius.

"Finding a new Defence teacher on time this close to the school year is impossible," said Minerva grimly. "I expect we'll have to take turns substituting."

The teachers groaned. Severus alone looked disappointed-clearly he was thinking there were better alternatives.

"At least we don't have to deal with *him* anymore," said Pomona grumpily. "I suppose his syllabus is as good as useless?"

"Not even worth the parchment he wrote it on," Minerva confirmed. She incidentally remembered Pomona's apt description of Sherlock Holmes: a vicious invasion of Horklumps. Mr. Holmes certainly felt like an invader. Usually, even the most hovering Muggle parent phased out from their child's Hogwarts education at the end of first year, as the chasm between the Muggle World and the Magic World became more glaring. Mr. Holmes refused to distance himself from the Magic World like a child who refused to let go of his newest toy, and kept communication lines open by enticing several (susceptible) wizards with the latest Muggle Technology. Just last month Minerva found Albus deeply entranced by a gadget called 'iPhone', and lately often found him immersed in a game the headmaster uncomprehendingly called 'Angry Birds'. Nothing short of memory erasure was going to make Mr. Holmes go away-and there *had* been a couple of furtive attempts from the Ministry of Magic-but Dr. Watson reacted against such moves with extreme prejudice, if the conversation between Albus and Dr. Watson she'd overheard really did mention Ministry Obliviators being returning with concussions and dislocated shoulders.

"Any idea of what we should be teaching?" asked Sinistra.

"O.W.L. topics for fifth years and down, certainly-Albus may have to oversee the N.E.W.T. students."

"Do we even have any?" Filius wondered.

"The usual handful," Minerva replied.

Sighs all around; it was just as well they were in times of peace. The quality of personnel the Magical Law Enforcement had to hire these days made them collectively cringe in shame.

"Where is Dumbledore, anyway?" Silvanus asked.

"He is preparing the new music classroom," said Minerva. "The music teacher he mentioned finally consented."

That moment, the staffroom door opened and they saw Albus Dumbledore at the threshold. He was holding the door for a small young woman who had a pallid face, eyes as glassy and opaque as mud-coloured marbles, and hip-length black hair. Rather curiously, she was dressed like a Muggle: fitted white slacks and tan heels, an azure blouse made of silky fabric, a peach-coloured blazer and a cream-coloured shoulder handbag with a golden chain strap.

"My apologies everyone," said Albus, as he briskly walked towards the head of the staffroom table. "I'm afraid I went a tad overboard in equipping the music room."

The young woman glanced to the side as Albus took his seat at the head. She eventually settled next to Charity Burbage looking like a beleaguered child.

"Without further ado, let us start the meeting," Albus said. "I'm afraid Gilderoy will not be joining us today-"

" *He's still teaching?* !"

Several people exclaimed the above in horror. Albus nodded.

"The school board decided that, though it is regrettable the new

Defence teacher has got mired in a scandal, since it was triggered by a Muggle who, presumably, is ignorant of Wizarding folk, he will not be dismissed."

Severus' sneer was the biggest amongst those who sneered. The other professors looked distraught.

"He is, however, on probation," said Albus gravely, "The accusation *is* a serious one. Should it be proven true, Professor Lockhart will face dismissal. Now," he started beaming. "I'm happy to introduce Ms. Jacqueline Shin. She has kindly consented to join us as Hogwarts first music instructor!"

The teachers clapped politely. Ms. Shin made a petite bow as she blushed.

The meeting proceeded as usual: they negotiated time tables, discussed students who were having trouble keeping up, whether they had to write the Ministry for time-turners and considered options for the handful of people who decided to leave Hogwarts early. Ms. Shin asked sensible questions to the Head of Houses, like the names and ages of the students who previously received music instruction or potentially might be interested.

"Oh, there is definitely interest," said Pomona. "Plenty of students like to imitate popular bands like the Weird Sisters or Celestina Warbeck. There's also a girl in my House who plays the harp."

"Classical or Celtic?" asked Ms. Shin.

Pomona tilted her head, confused. "There's a difference?"

"Celtic harps are generally smaller," said Ms. Shin, indicating the approximate size with her hands.

"How many instruments do you play?" asked Filius.

Ms. Shin counted her fingers.

"Five?" she eventually replied, in a tone that suggested she seriously doubted the accuracy of this number. "Are there any formal training schools the students might have learned from? I'm

sorry, but I learned under Muggle teachers and institutions, so I'm not familiar with the Magical counterparts."

"Most receive private tutoring or formal training after leaving Hogwarts at the Wizarding Academy of Dramatic Arts," squeaked Filius. "But the *Incipio Musica* charm has largely replaced live musicians at WADA-a pity."

"Are you in anyway related to Cecilia Shin?" asked Severus abruptly.

"She was my older sister," Ms. Shin replied.

This caused all the older teachers to stare at Ms. Shin incredulously. Soon enough, they could see the familial resemblance around the shape of her face, nose and mouth. However, whereas Cecilia was a cold beauty like a masterfully wrought silver statue standing in the middle of a winter storm, Jacqueline was more on the lines of a handcrafted doll, lovingly stitched by an amateur.

"I don't remember seeing you at Hogwarts," said Severus.

"I didn't go."

"Why not?"

"What do you call people who are born from magic families, but don't have magic?" asked Ms. Shin, blinking at the ceiling, "Squids?"

"You're a *Squib* ?" Pomona exclaimed.

"Dear me, so the rumours that Grandmaster Shin fathered a Squib is actually true?" said Severus with unmistakable condescension.

"Oh, I got a Hogwarts letter," said Ms. Shin. She reached into her handbag and pulled out an old parchment letter and showed it to them. Minerva recognised the acceptance letter, addressed to one Miss J. Shin.

"If you were accepted, why didn't you…?" asked Charity.

"I'm not talented in magic," said Ms. Shin with an air of apology.

"When I mentioned Squibs, I meant to say I'm *practically* a Squib. My father realised this when I was two. He's not called Grandmaster for nothing, you know."

"But if you received a Hogwarts Letter," Minerva argued, "That means you have reasonable amount of aptitude."

"No, no, it's true," Ms. Shin said, rubbing her head again with the same sort of desperate apology. "I wasn't raised completely Muggle-my father tutored me at home. But to this day I could only master two spells. I don't think I would've fared very well here. Good instruction can only do so much to improve severely limited talent."

The discussion quickly turned to classes after this. It was decided the new music classes would have a similar format as the Apparition and Flying classes-optional and weekly, but offered annually since it was reasonable to expect *some* level of demand. After some last-minute administrative paperwork, the meeting adjourned.

"Are you classically trained, Ms. Shin?" Filius asked eagerly after the meeting.

"Yes, sir," said Ms. Shin, smiling. "I studied Classical Music."

"I do a bit of choir directing on the side," squeaked Filius. "I was wondering if you could do the instrumental accompaniment. We've been making do with *Incipio Musica*, but you really can't replace real musicians. Do you play the piano?"

"A bit."

"Could you play for us?" asked Albus, eyes twinkling. To the teachers he said, "Please join us if you can. It will be *quite* the treat. I'm also rather proud of what I did for the music room."

About half the staff followed out of curiosity and politeness. Severus would have made a swift exit, except Albus snagged him before he could turn around, and ushered him to walk in front of him with a mischievous, ' *Oh, come* on*, Severus!* ' Thus Severus joined, very resentfully.

As it turned out, Albus had converted an entire *chamber* into a music

room. A magnificent pipe organ dominated a wall. Every string instrument in the violin family decorated the wall adjacent to it, and numerous guitars rested on stands. Twenty pianos stood in an artful arrangement. Wind instruments of every stripe and description were shelved in several tall cases. Drums, Xylophones, and other percussion instruments were clustered around in their own corner. Hundreds of music sheet stands and chairs cluttered the last wall. As if that wasn't enough, about half of the chamber was transformed into an orchestral pit, plus a rotating centre stage. The entire chamber was illuminated with thousands of floating candles and a large chandelier.

" *Tad* overboard, Headmaster?" asked Severus, heavy with sarcasm.

"I was very excited," said Albus in dead-earnestness.

Albus levitated one of the concert pianos to the rotating stage. Ms. Shin protested, saying the previous arrangement was fine. Albus just cheerfully added a cello to the stage in response, and then sat down on one the chairs orchestra pit and clasped his hands radiating anticipation.

"She needs a bit of firm encouragement, as you can tell," said Albus as the rest joined him.

Ms. Shin climbed up to the stage and hesitated in front of the piano and cello. Then with a little sigh, she duplicated herself into two.

" *Albus* !" hissed Minerva, amazed at what she just saw. Self-duplication was an advanced form of transfiguration, and only a handful of witches and wizards in the world were capable of it. Albus, however, put his finger on his lips and said, " *Shhh* !"

Two hours later, after Filius finished sobbing into his fifth handkerchief and Minerva and her colleagues ran out of songs to request, Ms. Jacqueline pleaded fatigue and banished her clone that was playing the cello.

"Bravo! Bravo!" Filius cried, clapping as hard as he was sobbing, which was very hard indeed. Everyone else was clapping too,

including Severus, who didn't seem to realise he was doing it. Ms. Shin ran her palms down her face and peaked up from the tips of her fingers, glowing pink.

The teachers lingered after the unscheduled concert to chat. Minerva asked about the duplication spell of course, and Ms. Shin appeared to have no earthly clue of its significance.

"Cecilia was able to create sixty clones when she was fourteen," she said. "Her record was a hundred and twenty. Even now, nineteen years after I learned how to do it, the most I can reliably manage is four."

Filius asked about her wand, and Ms. Shin said she never owned one. Severus asked about her potions education, and Ms. Shin confessed, after blowing up the kitchen and back garden three times and melting no less than six cauldrons, her father stopped trying to teach her potions. This inevitably led to Albus asking, with mild exasperation, what was the *other* spell Ms. Shin knew how to do.

"It's more of a precursor to a spell than an actual spell," said Ms. Shin awkwardly. "I can lock raw magic into a sheet of paper. It's the, uh, step zero to making paper talismans. I don't have enough magic to go beyond that."

Ms. Shin took her leave shortly thereafter. The Head of Houses lingered further.

"There's nothing wrong with her magic and, potions aside, she's modestly talented," said Filius. "So why did…?"

"If one sets the baseline on Jeremy and Jason Shin, or, Merlin forbid, Cecilia, Hogwarts would only admit five students on a good year," said Severus sardonically. "That may not be such a bad idea."

"Is *this* what you meant by firm encouragement, headmaster?" asked Pomona. "Ms. Shin seems to have a skewed view of her magical talent. Comparing yourself to the most powerful witch Hogwarts has seen in a century can't be healthy, especially if it is your own sister."

"I actually had only her music talent in mind when I spoke of firm encouragement," Albus replied, looking pensive. "I discovered the bewildering gaps in her magical education the same time as you. However, I don't think extending firm encouragement to other areas will go amiss."

Minerva, Pomona and Filius murmured in agreement. Severus sniffed and said nothing.

"How did you find her?" Pomona asked.

"Chance," replied Albus, before adding ominously, "and *Sherlock Holmes* ."

"Are you ready for school tomorrow?"

Harry tore his attention away from Mario Kart, which he was playing in the sitting room. John was puttering about the flat collecting books and discarded socks. Sherlock was away in Prague, investigating a mass grave containing no less than fifty bodies entombed under a derelict building that was recently burned down. John was going to join him once Harry left for Hogwarts.

"… Yeah," Harry sighed. He was actually dreading the start of term. Not because he wanted the holidays to continue. Summer was fun, but all the free time was starting to get wearying. He also missed Hogwarts, with it enchanted castle and environs, playing Quidditch, sleeping in his four-poster bed, and eating inside the Great Hall under the bewitched ceiling. He even missed his classes and schoolwork (except Potions, which was taught by Severus Snape). But going to Hogwarts meant severely limited access to technology. This could be very maddening at times. Harry often found himself longing for Google while going through paper indexes in the library and searching for a non-existent outlet in the Gryffindor Tower to charge his phone.

"Got all your essays?"

"Uh-huh."

"Did you finish packing your trunk?"

Harry pursed his lips as he avoided a banana peel, "Almost."

"Don't leave it until the morning."

Harry rolled his eyes and let out another sigh. "Okay."

He finished the race with a shockingly mediocre score. Harry was about to start another one, but John stood in front of the monitor and gave him a stern look. Harry reluctantly put his controller down and went upstairs to his room.

Harry navigated around the mess to stand before his open trunk in the epicentre. He'd already packed his clothes and Hogwarts robes, which John folded in military precision (John taught him how, but Harry couldn't get the hang of it). All his school books, essays and containers holding his potions ingredients were also in his trunk. His cauldron and telescope were still on his desk, snugly fitted in bubble wrap. All he had to do was pack them in with his socks and extra trainers. As he did so, Harry considered his bookcase and wondered if he could fit in *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings* . Then he remembered he forgot to pack his thermal fleece jacket-wizard cloaks looked nice, but they weren't good at blocking out cold-so he detoured to his wardrobe. There he realised he left his Nimbus under his bed. Harry dumped both his broomstick and his jacket into his trunk and crossed his arms. There was no more room. He'll have to put his novels in his messenger bag. Harry wondered if the Undetectable Extension charm was as difficult as everyone said it was.

Harry went back downstairs after binning all the chocolate frog wrappers and crumpled bits of paper on the floor. John was in the kitchen *cooking*, so Harry abandoned Mario Kart to give the sight the full concentration it deserved as a rare and mysterious phenomenon. He, John and Mrs. Hudson had a sumptuous dinner of grilled marinated beef slices and spicy salad greens wrapped in fresh lettuce leaves, and mouth-watering treacle pudding as dessert. Harry was too full and sleepy to do much else afterwards, so he let Mrs. Hudson tuck him into bed. He was much too old for this, honestly, but it was hard to deny Mrs. Hudson anything.

… Which was why, come September 1st, Mrs. Hudson was riding the same cab that was taking John and Harry to King's Cross. Harry told Hedwig she'll have to fly separately since trying to explain why he was bringing his pet owl to school to your Muggle landlady was a task best left to someone else. Hedwig shrugged before taking flight.

"I'm going to miss seeing you around the flat," said Mrs. Hudson as she fondly brushed Harry's fringe away. "You'll be back for Christmas this year, won't you luv?"

Harry nodded happily. Mrs. Hudson beamed at him.

They made it to King's Cross Station a good twenty minutes early. Harry wondered how he was going to enter platform nine and three quarters without Mrs. Hudson following them, but then Mrs. Hudson hugged both John and Harry at the entrance.

"Have a good year, Harry! And call me when you get to Prague, John. You will, won't you?"

"Of course," said John without missing a beat.

They waved as Mrs. Hudson got back into the cab. Harry looked at John after the black car vanished into the busy London traffic.

"What?" John said, raising an eyebrow. "You know I'm going to Prague."

"I thought you were leaving tomorrow," said Harry.

"It's a midnight flight," said John. "I just didn't tell her that."

They headed to the barrier between Platforms nine and ten, Harry wheeling his trunk behind him. Having done this before, Harry confidently trotted towards the brick wall that hid the magical entrance.

The confidence vanished when he and John crashed into a very solid wall. Harry was knocked off his feet and let go of his wheeled trunk. John crumped to a heap on the shiny floor, and Hedwig's empty cage rolled away.

"What in blazes d'you think you're doing?" yelled a station guard nearby.

"Wasn't paying attention," John grunted, clutching the left shoulder and face white.

The guard helped them back to their feet. Harry went after Hedwig's cage and got his trunk right-side up. It took a while for the colour to return to John's face. Harry pressed both hands against the barrier. It didn't give away. Panic started to bloom in his stomach.

"I don't understand," he whispered. "Why can't we get through?"

John, whose face was still stony from lingering pain, pulled out their magic-immune phone and started texting:

Hello, have bit of a situation. Please respond.

The SMS alert tone John set for Snape played in a couple of minutes: a lowing cow.

You have an owl. We had a conversation about this. McGonagall is already giving me the evil eye. What is it?

Gateway to 9 ¾ won't let us through. May require alternative transport. Sent Owl ahead because of landlady

Stop being difficult, Watson

I don't try to be.

John put the phone away with a sigh. All the mooing made Harry forgot about the pain-he was snickering.

"We might as well sit down. My shoulder is killing me."

They went to a nearby café. John ordered ice cream sundaes and a bag of ice for the jolted shoulder.

"I thought Professor Dumbledore healed your shoulder," said Harry, unable to keep the petulance out of his voice.

"He did," said John. "The muscles and bones and cartilage there are as good as new-even the nerve damage is gone. I got it checked."

"Then why does it keep on *hurting* ?" Harry asked.

"The bullet fragments," said John. "They're still there. Dumbledore told me if the fragments got there by magic, a skilled healer could banish it. But since they weren't, unless he could see the fragments, it's impossible. Sight and distance apparently do matter with Magic."

Harry sucked on his spoon thoughtfully.

"And wizards don't have magical MRI."

"No," said John. "Magic folk have a very medieval attitude towards medicine, I noticed. They *balk* at the idea of examining human blood and guts."

They whiled away time at the café. John called Mrs. Granger and Mr. Weasley and told them the situation. Harry again tried to pass through the barrier when Mrs. Granger said she and Hermione had no trouble getting through, but he still hit a solid wall. In the meantime, eleven o' clock came and went.

"Too late to ride the train now," said John. "Why is Snape taking so long…"

That moment, the café door burst open and Mrs. Weasley galloped inside, her handbag swinging off one hand, and Mr. Weasley right behind her.

"Oh, Harry, oh *dear*," said Mrs. Weasley frantically. "Why do things like this happen to you?"

Mr. Weasley ran a handkerchief over his sweaty bald-patch.

"I spoke with the gate master and even he can't figure out why the barrier isn't working," said Mr. Weasley. "We had to Apparate out of the platform and walk back to the station… there's a huge queue in front of the platform's only fireside where people who can't Apparate are floo-ing out."

"Did Lestrade make it out okay?" asked John, looking concerned.

"His father-in-law Apparated out with him," said Mr. Weasley. "The Muggle parents who got stuck will have to wait until someone fixes the barrier."

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley sat down at their small table. It struck Harry how fortunate they were the café was so noisy, because any Muggle who overheard their conversation might report them as insane asylum escapees.

"Your kids made it to the train okay?" said John calmly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Weasley, wringing her hands, "But that's not the *point* ! Harry missed the train! How are we sending him to Hogwarts, Arthur?"

"I could Apparate with him to Hogsmeade," said Mr. Weasley. "Or we could use the floo-network to go there directly… but then we'd have to go to Diagon Alley for a fireplace and owl the teachers about it…"

John's phone mooed.

"Excuse me," said John to a very startled Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, "Hi, Snape."

John listened to whatever Snape had to say.

"A Knight Bus?" said John blankly. "What are you talking about?"

Snape's reply was too muffled to hear, but the tone was very… Snape-like.

"Thank you so much, Snape, you are so kind and thoughtful," John dead-panned.

More snarky replies.

"Yes, stop terrorizing my son, or the next time you see me, I'll be weepy and full of *feelings* . What, you think this is an empty threat? There's going to desperate, wailing *tears* . You know, I might even

confess secret *feelings* to you."

" *This is harassment*," said Snape's horrified voice.

"Then stop," said John reasonably.

John ended the call. Harry thought he will never get enough of John casually teasing Snape and getting away with it.

"So my dear friend Snape says let Harry take the Knight Bus to Hogwarts," said John, in mock-seriousness. "Then Hagrid will pick him up at the entrance. Now what is a Knight Bus and why do we have to wait till sunset?"

"Well, the Knight Bus is transport for stranded wizards and witches," explained Mrs. Weasley. "You just stick out your wand and that will flag the bus. It runs night and day and goes everywhere, but you have to make sure you're flagging it somewhere discreet and preferably when it's dark, so Muggles won't see."

"Bit difficult here in London," John remarked.

"That's not a problem," said Mr. Weasley. "Just flag the bus in front of the Leaky Cauldron, and he should be fine."

"Okay," said John. "Thanks for dropping by, Molly, Arthur. You didn't have to."

"Oh, it was nothing," said Mrs. Weasley. "And don't you worry about Harry. I'll go with him and see to it he gets there."

"Thank you, Molly. You're a saint," said John fervently.

The four of them ended up having lunch together at their favourite Thai place. Mr. Weasley was positively bursting with excitement when John took them to the little hole-in-the-wall restaurant. His enthusiasm garnered attention from the owner, who was curious about his and Mrs. Weasley's robes. Not for the first time, Harry admired the way John handled the situation. John told Mr. Pran that Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were a Magical couple visiting Mundane London to see how it was like to live in a world where you have no choice but to let Nature have her tyrannical way with you. John's

face was so straight and voice so completely serious, Mr. Pran took it as a nice joke.

"Bless you, John," said Mrs. Weasley. "I don't know how you do it."

"Bless *you*, Molly," John returned. "You and Arthur are a God send. I don't know how Sherlock and I would've coped without you two. Very badly, probably. When I stop and think about it, I'm like: my son is the Magical World's Most Famous Child and I'm just a stupid Muggle. What the heck?"

They all laughed. Then they enjoyed Mr. Pran's excellent Pad Kee Mao and Green Curry.

Harry spent the afternoon with John, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. John patiently explained to Mr. Weasley the law of aerodynamics using a couple of apples and a length of string, and Mrs. Weasley told them stories of Hogwarts when she was young. Harry felt an undercurrent of nervousness, but also the assurance things were taken care of.

Right after sundown, the four of them went to the Leaky Cauldron. Mr. Weasley drove them there on his Ford Anglia. At the entrance, Mrs. Weasley stuck out her wand.

BANG.

A set of headlights blinded them all. Harry let out a yell as a triple-decker violently purple bus appeared out of thin air and came to an abrupt stop after bouncing off the pavement once. Gold lettering over the windshield spelled The Knight Bus. Then a conductor in purple uniform leapt out of the bus and began to speak loudly:

"Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand, step on board, and we can take you anywhere you want to go. My name is Stan Shunpike, and I will be your conductor this evening…"

The conductor stopped abruptly. He had just caught sight of Harry, who was flattening his hair over his scar.

"Woss that on your 'ead?" asked Stan, dropping his professional manner.

"Nothing," said Harry quickly. Close up, he saw that Stan Shunpike was only a few years older than him, seventeen or eighteen at most, with large, protruding ears and quite a few pimples. "So-this bus goes *anywhere* ?"

"Yep," said Stan proudly, "anywhere you like, long's it's on land. Can't do nuffink underwater. 'Ere," he said, looking suspicious, "you *did* flag us down, dincha? Woss your name?"

"Harry Watson," said John, interrupting, "listen, he needs to get to Hogwarts, ASAP. How much is the fare?"

"Eleven Sickles," said Stan, "but for firteen you get 'ot chocolate, and for fifteen you get an 'ot water bottle an' a toofbrush in the colour of your choice."

"Two people, no extras," said John firmly, extracting the wizard gold kept for emergencies and shoving them into Stan's hands, "I'm assuming Muggles can't see you? Even in the middle of London?"

"Them!" said Stan contemptuously. "Don' listen properly, do they? Don' look properly either. Never notice nuffink, they don'."

"Yeah, sure," said John ironically.

Stan and Mr. Weasley hefted Harry's trunk into the Knight Bus. Instead of seats, there was an odd assortment of mismatched armchairs crammed and grouped haphazardly around windows inside. Some of these appeared to have fallen over when the bus stopped abruptly at the Leaky Cauldron. A few witches and wizards were still getting to their feet, grumbling, and somebody's shopping bag had slid the length of the bus-an unpleasant mixture of frog spawn, cockroaches, and custard creams was scattered all over the floor.

"Where are the seatbelts?" asked John, looking alarmed, "and why aren't the chairs bolted down?"

"'Choo talkin' about?" asked Stan, looking suspicious again.

"Let's go, Harry dear," said Mrs. Weasley swiftly, "You don't want to miss the welcoming feast do you?"

John enveloped Harry in a tight hug, whispering, "I'll text you went I get to Prague. And look after Julia, okay?"

"Okay. Bye!" said Harry, waving at door. Mrs. Weasley tugged him back inside, and Stan rammed the doors shut. The bus set off again, swaying ominously. They bowled down Charing Cross road, mounting the pavement and swerving. Then, with a tremendous BANG, they were all flung backward. Mrs. Weasley's armchair toppled right over. Harry narrowly avoided falling by seizing a candle bracket. He looked outside the window: they were now speeding down a motorway.

"Just outside Birmingham," said Stan, shoving Harry's trunk back where it was last placed, which was right behind the driver, who was sitting in an armchair in front of a steering wheel. "This is our driver, Ernie Prang. This is 'Arry Watson, Ern."

Ernie Prang, an elderly wizard wearing very thick glasses, nodded to Harry. Harry nodded back nervously. Ernie didn't seem to have mastered the use of a steering wheel. The Knight Bus kept bouncing off the asphalt, but it didn't hit anything; median dividers and walls jumped out of the way as it approached and back into position once it had passed.

BANG.

The chairs slid backward again as the Knight Bus jumped from the Birmingham motorway to a quiet country lane full of hairpin bends. Hedgerows on either side of the road were leaping out their way as they mounted the verges. From here they moved to a main street in the middle of a busy town, then to a viaduct surrounded by tall hills, then to a windswept road between high-rise flats, each time with a loud BANG.

"Snape suggested this on purpose," Harry muttered as he helped Mrs. Weasley up from the floor for the sixth time. "There's no way he didn't."

"'Ogwarts stop after this," said Stan brightly, "We just have to let Madam Marsh off in Abergavenny."

"Better go get her, Stan," said Ernie. "We'll be there in a minute."

Stan passed Mrs. Weasley and Harry's armchairs and disappeared up a narrow wooden staircase. When Stan came back, he was with a faintly green witch wrapped in a travel cloak.

"'Ere you go, Madam Marsh," said Stan happily. Ernie stamped on the brake and the chairs slid a foot or so to the front of the bus. Madam Marsh clamped a handkerchief over her mouth and tottered down the steps. Stan threw her bag out after her and shut the doors. There was another loud BANG, and they were rolling through a picturesque village covered in autumn foliage. Harry caught a sight of a pub with a severed boar's head sign creaking in the wind. At last they rolled to a halt outside the gates to Hogwarts. Mrs. Weasley stumbled out looking vastly relieved. Stan helped Harry lower his trunk to the ground. Unthinkingly, Harry wiped his sweaty forehead.

"… Blimey!" Stan shouted, pointing, "Ern, come 'ere! Come ' *ere* !"

Before Harry could do anything, a very familiar booming voice rattled the gates.

"HARRY! *There* yeh are!"

Harry's heart leapt. The massive form of Hagrid, the Hogwarts' gamekeeper, was striding towards him, his beetle-black eyes flashing over his bristly beard.

"Hagrid!" he said, waving. "Is sorting over?"

"Jus' started when I left," said Hagrid, opening the gates. "Probably done by the time we get there."

Stan leapt to the ground behinds them. Wizards and witches were staring avidly through the windows from all three levels.

"'Choo really 'Arry Watson?" Stan demanded excitedly. "Is that a scar I'm seeing?"

"Harry Watson?" repeated Hagrid, frowning. "This is Harry Potter."

"I knew it!" Stan shouted gleefully. "Ern! Guess 'oo 'Arry Watson is, Ern! 'E's 'Arry *Potter* ! I can see 'is scar!"

"Gotta be off," said Hagrid, who picked up Harry's trunk like it was small briefcase, "Lots ter do…"

"'Ow come you di'n't tell us 'oo you are, eh, 'Arry?" said Stan, beaming at Harry, while Ernie's owlish face peered interestedly over Stan's shoulder.

Because too many people react like you when I do, Harry didn't say. Instead he followed after Hagrid and said to Stan and Ern and Mrs. Weasley, "Bye. Thank you, Mrs. Weasley!"

"'Bye, 'Arry!" called Stan.

"Have a good term!" said Mrs. Weasley, waving furiously.

Harry waved one last time, and headed to the brightly illuminated castle in the distance.

"So did'yeh ever fig're ou' why yeh couldn' send an owl back ter me?" said Hagrid as Harry jogged alongside him (he had to take three steps to every one stride of Hagrid's enormous boots).

Harry explained all about Dobby.

"Fishy," growled Hagrid. "If I'd've known-"

"Definitely dodgy," Harry agreed. "Every time he got close to letting something slip, he started banging his head against the wall. Why would he do that?"

"Pu' it this way, Harry," said Hagrid. "House-elves got powerful magic on their own, but they can' use it witho' permission. They can' disobey their master's direct orders either. Dobby was prob'ly usin' a loop-hole teh get ter yeh or he was ordered ter stop yeh from comin' back to Hogwarts. Anyone at school with a grudge against yeh?"

"Yes," said Harry instantly. "Draco Malfoy. He hates me. But I don't know if he owns a house-elf."

"Well, who ever owns him will be from an ol' wizardin' family, and they'll be rich," said Hagrid. "House-elves come with big ol' manors and castles and places like that."

"Like Hogwarts," said Harry, thinking the hundreds of elves in the Kitchen.

"Yep," said Hagrid. "Biggest house-elf settlement in Britain, I reckon. Happiest elves too."

Harry nodded silently. He had no trouble imagining Malfoy strutting around in large manor house ordering house-elves about. Malfoy usually had the best of everything, and didn't Mr. Malfoy tell Mr. Borgin to pick up his goods from his *manor?* Plus, sending his family servant to stop Harry from going back to Hogwarts or at least get him into trouble was exactly the sort of thing Malfoy would do. *But* . Dobby said the plan was months in the making, and it was going to threaten the whole school. Was he taking Dobby too seriously? But if Dobby wasn't lying, what was he trying to warn him about? Harry couldn't say why, but the way Dobby treated himself made him wonder…

"Well, s'good thing yer new parents aren' the usual sort o' Muggles," said Hagrid as he opened the oak doors. "I heard from Professor Dumbledore how they t'care of yer official warnin' from the Ministry, pronto like… and Sh'rlock's been peltin' me owls all summer askin' questions. Curious one, ain't he?"

"You have no idea," said Harry.

They entered the Great Hall. All the students were seated in their House tables and chatting and eating merrily. Several students craned their necks to see who entered and pointed when they realised it was him. Harry spotted Ron and Hermione at the Gryffindor table and headed off to their direction. On his way, he saw a familiar face at the Hufflepuff table. His eyes briefly met a pair of large brown eyes. He blinked and he'd passed the Hufflepuff table.

He didn't think about them again that day.

Final Notes : McGonagall just wanted to say, "Of course it was that dreadful man who was behind it." Dumbledore is addicted to Angry Birds, and I am a cruel, cruel person, letting Lockhart 'teach'. Snape had no ulterior motives when he suggested the Knight Bus. Of course he didn't. Harry was just being very paranoid. ;-)

Teaching Lessons

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty One: Teaching Lessons

John texted as promised the next morning. Harry read the texts as he dressed himself one-handed. John had made it to Prague without any hiccups and Sherlock was already doing horrible things to the skeletons the Czech police had unearthed. John predicted they'd return in a couple of weeks, as the case proved to be rather difficult due to length the bodies had been interred.

Anything you want from Prague? John asked.

I don't know what Prague has, Harry texted back.

Then will find something funny and useless, replied John, which made Harry grin.

Professor McGonagall handed out their course schedules at the Great Hall over breakfast. Harry noted Gryffindor had double Herbology with the Hufflepuffs first. That reminded him of something-or rather, someone.

"Do you know which house Julia got sorted into?" Harry asked. He knew where Ginny sorted to-Gryffindor, just like her brothers.

"Who?" Neville said, looking blank. This didn't surprised Harry much as Neville had the worst memory of anyone he'd ever met.

"Julia Lestrade," Harry clarified. The blank look on Neville persisted. Hermione, who had *Voyages with Vampires* propped up against a milk jug, answered for him.

"She got sorted to Hufflepuff. See, she's over there."

Harry scanned the Hufflepuff table and sure enough there was Julia, sipping on a glass of pumpkin juice, studying the breakfast food selection and looking glum. Harry vaguely remembered John telling him Julia was a vegetarian who eschewed wheat. Harry scanned the Gryffindor table and noted the tureens of porridge, plates of kippers, mountains of toast, pots of jam and butter, and platters of bacon, sausages, and eggs. He never realized how heavy on meat and poultry their breakfasts were, and wondered if Julia would end up having to survive on fruit alone. Then Harry caught the sight of Ron and Seamus chomping on pork sausages and he completely lost his appetite.

Harry, Ron and Hermione left the castle together after breakfast. They passed the vegetable patch and arrived at the greenhouses. Their classmates were already there waiting for Professor Sprout. Harry, Ron and Hermione had just joined them when she came striding away from an innocent-looking willow tree planted in the middle of the grounds, which Harry knew for a fact wasn't innocent- he once tried to take a break there last year after a long walk and one of its thick branches almost took his head off- accompanied by Gilderoy Lockhart.

Professor Sprout was a squat little witch who wore a patched hat over her flyaway hair. As usual, she had large amounts of earth on her clothes and her fingernails were dark from constantly handling soil. Lockhart, on the other hand, was immaculate in sweeping robes of turquoise, his golden hair shining under a perfectly-positioned gold-trimmed turquoise hat.

"Oh, hello there!" he called, beaming at the assembled students. "I was just telling Professor Sprout the fascinating characteristics of a Whomping Willow. But I don't want you running away with the idea

I'm better at Herbology than she is! I just happened to have met several exotic plants on my travels…"

"Greenhouse three today, chaps!" said Professor Sprout, who was looking deeply disgruntled, and not her usual cheerful self.

There was a murmur of interest. They've only worked in greenhouse one so far, and greenhouse three housed the more interesting and dangerous plants. Professor Sprout took out a large key from her belt and unlocked the door. They were immediately greeted with hot air, and the smell of damp earth and lush vegetation. Lockhart opened his mouth to say something, but Professor Sprout closed the door firmly at his face after ushering her students in. She led them to a trestle bench in the centre of the greenhouse. About twenty pairs of different-coloured ear muffs were lying on the bench.

"Today we will be repotting Mandrakes," said Professor Sprout. "Who can tell me the properties of the Mandrake?"

To no one's surprise, Hermione's hand shot up.

"Mandrake, or Mandragora, is a powerful restorative," said Hermione, sounding like she swallowed the textbook (the Sherlock-voice in Harry's head said: plant ***genus*** Mandragora, of the nightshades family). "It is used to return people who have been transfigured or cursed to their original state."

"Excellent. Ten points to Gryffindor," said Professor Sprout. "The Mandrake forms an essential part of most antidotes." (The Sherlock-voice in Harry's head said they also had delirium-inducing hallucinogenic alkaloids.) "It is also, however, dangerous. Can someone tell me why?"

Hermione's hand shot up again.

"The cry of a Mandrake is fatal to anyone who hears it," said Hermione promptly. (Again, the Sherlock-voice in Harry's head drawled: also all parts of the mandrake plant are poisonous).

"Exactly. Take another ten points," said Professor Sprout. "Now the Mandrakes here are very young."

She pointed to a row of deep trays as she spoke, and everyone shuffled forward for a better look. A hundred or so tufty little plants, purplish green in colour, were growing there in rows. They looked quite unremarkable.

"Everyone take a pair of earmuffs," said Professor Sprout.

Everyone scrambled to seize a pair that wasn't pink and fluffy. Harry snagged a moss-green one.

"When I tell you to put them on, make sure your ears are *completely* covered," said Professor Sprout. "When it is safe to remove them, I will give you the thumbs-up. Right-earmuffs *on* ."

Harry snapped the earmuffs over his ears. They shut out sound completely. Professor Sprout put the remaining pink and fluffy pair over her ears, rolled up her robe sleeves, grasped one of the tufty plants firmly and pulled hard.

Instead of roots, a tiny, muddy and extremely ugly baby popped out. The leaves were growing right out of its head. It had pale green, mottled skin, and was clearly bawling at the top of it lungs. Professor Sprout took a large clay plot from under the table and plunged the Mandrake into it, burying it in dark, damp compost until only the tufted leaves were visible. Professor Sprout dusted off her hands, gave them the thumbs-up, and removed her own earmuffs.

"As our Mandrakes are only seedlings, their cries won't kill yet," she said calmly as though she'd done nothing more exciting than water some basil. "However, they *will* knock you out for several hours, and as I'm sure none of you want to miss your first day back, make sure your earmuffs are securely in place while you work. I will attract your attention when it is time to pack up. Four to a tray-the pots are here-compost in the sacks over there-and be careful of the Venomous Tentacula, it's teething."

She gave a sharp slap to a spiky, dark red plant as she spoke, making it draw in the long feelers that had been inching sneakily over her shoulder.

Justin Finch-Fletchley joined Harry, Ron and Hermione at the tray

they occupied.

"Thank you for inviting me over to your birthday party," said Justin brightly as they filled their pots with dragon-dung compost. "It was lots of fun, and it was nice to have people you can talk about magic to freely." (Hermione nodded in agreement). "Did you get to read Lockhart's books? He's really something, isn't he? Awfully brave chap. I'd died of fear if I'd been cornered in a telephone booth by a werewolf, but he stayed cool and-zap-just *fantastic* ."

Harry nodded noncommittally, but didn't say what he was really thinking. Sherlock said the frequent mention of telephone booths in Finland where this werewolf incident supposedly took place was suspicious, because Finland stopped offering public telephone services years ago due to the prevalence of mobile phones. Lockhart would have been at Hogwarts when telephone booths were still at large in Finland; another point against Lockhart's credibility beside his lack of tan.

"I made mother read his books and I think she's starting to see how useful it'll be to have a fully trained wizard in the family," Justin went on. "My name was down for Eton, you know, and I can't tell you how glad I am I came here instead. Mother was always a bit disappointed about that."

After this they didn't have much chance to talk as they had their earmuffs on and had to concentrate on the Mandrakes. Professor Sprout had made it look easy, but it wasn't. The Mandrakes didn't like coming out of the earth, but didn't seem to like going back into it either. They squirmed, kicked, failed their sharp little fists, and gnashed their teeth. Perhaps it was because he knew Sherlock was nosing through a mass grave, but Harry had several morbid thoughts on Mandrakes as he repotted them. If the cry didn't kill you, pulling out an innocent-looking plant and finding a tiny, ugly, green-skinned baby where the roots should be could cause fatal heart-failure to an unsuspecting person. There was also the *harvesting* of Mandrakes-would it look killing a miniature person? Harry shuddered at his own thoughts.

By the end of class, Harry was sweaty, aching and covered in earth like everyone else. They rushed back to the castle for a quick wash

and the Gryffindors headed to Transfigurations.

Professor McGonagall's classes were always difficult, but Harry figured out how to turn his beetle into a button in the end. *It's about associations*, he remembered Sherlock saying, *don't think about the results only, think about how the names are similar or how the two objects look similar-then visualize the change.* Harry looked around after turning his beetle into a very plain, very non-descript black button with two holes. Hermione was concentrating hard on her own beetle, which was rapidly turning into a shiny black coat button, Ron was stabbing his wand on his desk, Seamus was giving his beetle a lot of exercise as it scuttled around in circles to avoid his wand, Dean was pressing his wand tip on the back of his beetle, and Neville somehow engulfed his desk with grey smoke and appeared to have no clue as to how he did this. Professor McGonagall gave Harry a nod of approval when she checked his work, and suggested he try transfiguring more beetles into different kinds of buttons. Harry amused himself turning beetles into the most outrageously shaped buttons he could imagine. He and Hermione shared a laugh at the end of class over the button he made to look like a demented version of Browser Koopa.

Ron, on the other hand, was having problems.

"Stupid-useless-thing-" he growled, whacking his battered wand against his desk furiously.

"What's wrong?"

"The tip fell off," Ron said angrily as he raised his wand, which let out a volley of small bangs like a firecracker from its cracked end, "See, the unicorn hair is hanging out."

"Write home for another one," Harry suggested, thinking beating up an already battered wand wasn't helping things.

"Yeah, like Mum and Dad could afford one so soon after start of term," Ron grumbled, stuffing his hissing wand back into his bag.

Harry said nothing. He felt a bit awkward. He didn't have to worry about money because his witch mother and wizard father left him a

vault in Gringotts containing a small fortune in wizard gold, and John and Sherlock had a steady stream of income independent of paying work. Harry learned about the latter this past summer when he told John he could pay for his school things from now on. Sherlock deduced Harry only said so because he hadn't been working on cases for many weeks, thus was concerned about his and John's (relatively) meagre finances.

"We have passive income," said Sherlock as he opened a newspaper.

"What's passive income?" asked Harry. He'd never heard of such a thing.

"Anything from pension, interest, royalties, and rent," said Sherlock. "You know what interest is, don't you?"

Harry nodded. He learned about banks in primary school.

"John has an Army pension," explained Sherlock. "We also have investments. You don't know what stocks are? I didn't think so. A share of stock represents a slice of ownership over a publicly-traded company. The share could mean an ownership of one out of million, one tenth of a million, or one out of a billion; it depends on the company's size the how small the company decides to fracture itself to."

Harry pictured a building slicing itself to thousands of little squares and someone buying a square.

"Some company stock offer dividends," Sherlock went on. "The company literally pays you for owning a share of their stock. AT&T for example has historically paid dividends around 20 to 25 pence per share every quarter."

That didn't sound much, Harry thought. Sherlock raised an eyebrow, like he knew what Harry was thinking, which, knowing Sherlock, he probably did.

"Supposed you buy a hundred shares of stock, and the dividend is set to 30 pence per share; how much can you expect to make from

dividends alone?" asked Sherlock.

"30 pounds a quarter or 120 pounds a year," Harry answered.

"Correct. Now what if you bought a thousand shares?"

"300 pounds a quarter or 1200 pounds a year," said Harry. Suddenly, he understood what Sherlock was driving at, "So the more shares you have, the more money you make in return!"

"Exactly," said Sherlock. "Now instead of spending the dividends, what if you reinvested them to buy more stock?"

"You have more shares, therefore more dividends!" said Harry excitedly, imagining an exponentially growing tree.

Sherlock smirked. "That is the essence of dividend investing: you don't care so much about stock prices as you are interested in the dividend payout. Also, if you reinvest your dividends, you experience something very akin to the magic of compounding interest. Let's return to our hundred shares example and set the stock price to £20 per share, 30 pence dividend per quarter. Unreasonably assuming no change in cost, same dividend payout, 100% reinvestment and no additional purchases, at the end of first quarter you'll have 101.5 shares, the £30 dividend purchasing 1.5 additional shares-yes, Harry, you can buy fractions of a share-and on the second quarter you'll have 103.022 shares. And so on and so forth. In ten years you'll have 179.08 shares paying you £1581.70 annually. This is around £380 more of what you would've made if you didn't reinvest-and you didn't have to *do* anything.

"But of course, this is too simplistic of a model. For one thing, we're overlooking one crucial factor: *risk* . All stocks carry risk. Can you tell me what it is?"

Harry thought about it. Among the things Uncle Vernon liked to complain about (and Uncle Vernon complained about many things), besides the people at work, Harry, the council, Harry, the bank, and Harry, was how the economy was tanking. He also complained how Grunnings, the drill company he was the director of, wasn't doing very well and how much work it was going to be to jump ship.

"A company can go under," said Harry slowly. "Go out of business."

"And when a company goes out of business, its stock loses all value," said Sherlock, nodding at Harry in approval. "This is not quite the case, but for purposes of this illustration: a pound is a pound is a pound. As long as you keep your pound *as is*, you are guaranteed to have a pound. But a company stock's price can *change* -if you use your pound to buy stock, it can become less than a pound, more than a pound or become zero. That is the inherent risk of all stock."

Harry nodded. Suddenly dividend investment didn't sound very exciting anymore. Sherlock smirked again.

"But not all companies are created equal. Some are hardier than others. Take Coca-Cola. Nestle. Visa. Master Card. Pepsi. Marks & Spenser. ITV. All those famous names even a child knows because they see them at the shops."

"How can you know this without ever doing the shopping?" asked John in exasperation.

Sherlock ignored that. "If you look through their history, you'll find these companies are financially stable and have consistent revenue growth. Their stock also tends to be expensive-meaning investors are willing to pay premium for their stock."

"So you could stick to big reliable companies," said Harry.

"Or buy venture company stock shares when they're still small and cheap," said John. "But that's bit of a gamble. There's no grantee the company you're investing in is the next Apple or Google."

" *Or* you can opt for index funds," said Sherlock. "When it comes down to it, very few people make money picking individual stocks. Even the best of them rarely beat average market returns. Many do significantly worse. An Index fund resolves this problem by letting you buy ownership of an entire market."

Both John and Harry stared at Sherlock. Buying ownership of an entire market? You could do that?

"When you buy an index fund, you're essentially buying small shares

from *hundreds* of market-representing companies rather than larger shares of a selected few," Sherlock explained, "putting your eggs in a large grid instead of a handful of baskets, as it were. So even if you lose one slot, you still have several hundreds of other slots making up the slack. Your index fund will do as well as the market it represents, and usually includes companies that pay dividends. *All* of those companies will be paying you-as long as you have shares of the index fund."

"Is this why you bullied me into buying index funds with the award money I got for clobbering the Golem?" John asked.

" *Yes*," said Sherlock with a stern glare, "You have several virtues, John, but financial savvy is not one of them."

"Would've been nice if you explained this to me first," John grouched. "I suppose my lack of financial savvy is the reason why you're handling my portfolio?"

"Of course," said Sherlock, in an air of 'duh'. "You have nothing to complain about. The account is under your name and I haven't touched it beyond buying the indexes. If anything, you've made gains even in this market."

"Of course you did," John dead-panned, "Do you see me complaining? Now answer me this: how did you end up knowing so much about investments when you can't be arsed to remembering the solar system?"

"My father used real investments and money to teach us maths," said Sherlock haughtily. "Real-life problems are always more interesting than those ridiculous questions warbling about apples and oranges. And if you did well, there was a tangible reward at the end. Mycroft revelled in the facts and figures, and promptly ventured into value investing. I believe his ability to *add* to the treasury rather than merely spend it was vital in securing his role as the British Government. I, on the other hand, only wanted to make enough so I would never have to prostitute my time and wits for money."

"Neither poverty nor riches, yeah?" remarked John. "You know, your dad is really awesome. My dad never talked about money to me.

Good thing our children both real and imaginary have you."

Sherlock raised the newspaper he holding above eye-level, thus covering his entire face. "Mmmn."

Later, Sherlock sat Harry down and showed him all of their account statements. Harry boggled at the amount Sherlock got for some paying cases, gaped at what John was making each month from just the blog, and marvelled at the actively growing fortune the two of them had amassed apart from pay. Then Sherlock made Harry calculate how much they'd spent the previous month using the receipts he'd nailed to the mantelpiece with a knife, how much they made from the account statements, and the amount left over if any, and told John to check his answers (but not help him). Harry had a hard time at it because it had been more than a year since he'd done serious maths and he was not allowed to use a calculator. But the exercise did much to put Harry's money worries to rest.

He couldn't share this with Ron, though. As fascinating as it was at the time, and as much as Harry wanted the Weasleys to stop being poor, the image of him retelling the whole episode to Ron just looked patronizing. So Harry kept his mouth shut as they went to the Great Hall for lunch. Ron's bad mood persisted. Hermione showing them the handful of perfectly transfigured coat buttons did nothing to improve it.

"What's after Lunch?" asked Harry, eager to change the subject.

"Defence Against the Dark Arts," said Hermione at once.

" *Why*," demanded Ron, seizing her schedule, "have you outlined all Lockhart's lessons in little hearts?"

Hermione snatched the schedule back, blushing furiously.

They finished lunch and went outside to the overcast courtyard. Hermione sat down on a stone step and buried her nose in *Voyages with Vampires* again. Ron and Harry stood talking about Quidditch for a few minutes until Harry noticed a small figure had stumbled into the courtyard. Looking up, Harry realized the thick mane of dark brown hair tied up in a ponytail belonged to Julia Lestrade. She had

a pinched expression on her face, like she hadn't eaten in a while, and she squinting around looking desperately lost.

"Hello," Harry called out.

Julia whipped her head around and squinted at Harry's direction. Eventually recognition dawned on her face.

"Harry," she sighed. "I'm *lost* ." The last two words came out like a distressed wail.

"Where were you heading to?" asked Harry.

"The Hufflepuff common room," said Julia, rubbing her eyes and squinting again. "I went to the Great Hall, but there wasn't anything I can eat. So I was going to get the food I saved from breakfast."

"Lunch was heavy on the meat, wasn't it?" said Harry, remembering the shepherd's pie and ham sandwiches.

Julia drooped. She looked wrung out and exhausted. " *Everything* had meat in it."

"There were salads."

"I'm not a cow," Julia muttered darkly.

Ron snorted. "And I thought Harry's pork-phobia was bad."

Harry shot him a glare.

"You can request food from the Kitchens," said Harry. "The house-elves there make a mean Pad Thai and their lentil dishes are really good. They even mastered fancy Bibimbap last year. You know, the ones served it in the heated stone vessels."

Julia looked hopeful until she checked her watch. "But class starts in ten minutes…"

"Dinner then? I can talk to Blippy and he can send it up to the Hufflepuff table."

"Potter! Are you chatting up *another* girl?"

Loud and scathing, Draco Malfoy's voice echoed around the courtyard. He stopped right behind Julia, flanked as he usually was at Hogwarts by his thuggish cronies, Crabbe and Goyle.

"So which number is she?" drawled Malfoy. "Was Weasley's sister not good enough for you?"

Crabbe and Goyle sniggered stupidly. Ron flushed purple.

"Eat slugs, Malfoy," he snarled.

"I don't hear you protesting," Malfoy said, smirking maliciously at Harry. "Was she really that bad? Not that it surprises me- *oh.* " Julia had turned around to frown up at Malfoy, and the quality of malice in Malfoy's voice changed, "Good lord, you have nerve. You're actually chatting up to the *grandmaster's granddaughter* ?"

Malfoy didn't shout the last bit out, but then he didn't have to: half of the courtyard was listening in, including a small, mousy-haired boy holding a Muggle camera. Harry had no idea what Malfoy meant by grandmaster or why he would call the sad faced, clean-shaven old man Harry met at the Leaky Cauldron that, but he didn't care.

"We're just talking," said Harry coldly, "having a civil conversation. I know it's a foreign language to you…"

"Is that what you're calling it?" Malfoy sneered. To Julia he said, "Hey, Shin. I wouldn't waste my time with him if I were you. Who wants to hang out with someone who thinks he's special because he has a scar on his face? *I* don't need someone to cut my face up and pretend to be sick all the time to feel special, thanks, don't you agree?"

Harry was about to retort, but Julia-hungry, exhausted, and patience clearly tried to the limit-gritted her teeth as if the last shreds of her civility were hanging there for dear life and faced Malfoy squarely.

"Excuse me," she snapped. "But who *are* you?"

The courtyard erupted with laughter. Even the knot of Slytherin fifth-

years were chuckling like they couldn't help themselves. Shocked and humiliated, Malfoy skulked back into the castle. Crabbe and Goyle lumbered after him.

"I changed my mind," said Ron after he finished laughing, "She's not that bad. I think I like her."

Hermione shut *Voyages with Vampires* with a loud snap. There was an angry glint in her eye.

"Well, good for you," she snapped. "Let's go. Class starts in five minutes."

The four of them returned to the castle together. Harry felt bad for Julia, who missed two meals and didn't have time to pick up anything because her next class was *Potions* . Ron kept going on about Julia's comeback to Malfoy. Julia quickly dismissed it.

"I didn't *mean* it as a comeback," Julia protested, "I have really bad eyesight. He sounded familiar, but I couldn't make out his face, so I asked. It just came out really badly."

Harry goggled. Was this why Julia didn't recognise him at Knockturn Alley? Now that he thought about it, he was pretty sure Julia wasn't wearing glasses in the bowling alley either. How could she live life so blurry?

"Why don't you wear glasses?"

"My grandpa doesn't believe in glasses," said Julia wearily. "He wants me to correct my sight with magic the hard way. I practice as often as I can, but I'm no good at it." She pulled out pair dark plastic framed glasses from her robe pocket and put them on. Her resemblance to Mr. Lestrade vanished when the lenses obscured her eyes. "Grandpa would call this cheating."

They separated soon afterwards, Julia heading to the dungeons and Harry, Ron and Hermione to the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom. Harry entered thinking nothing in particular.

Then he stared.

Harry couldn't believe it-all of the walls in the classroom were covered with framed photographs of Gilderoy Lockhart. Several of them were signed, and all of the photographic Lockharts were grinning and winking cheekily at him. As Harry dazedly pondered how he was supposed to take this, the real thing approached him.

"Harry!" said Lockhart, flashing his gleaming white teeth and planting both hands on Harry's shoulders in a paternal way. "So we meet again! I see you've kept all the books I gave you at the signing-good, good… It is unfortunate our first meeting was marred by such ridiculous accusations, but a celebrity can't live without a bit of controversy, eh? Well, you'll know soon enough. If you do well, you'll be like me, really taking in the fame! You're lucky that a few people already know you because of that business with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, you know. I had to work for every bit of recognition I have! I mean, it's not an easy to become Order of Merlin, Third Class, honourary member of the Dark Force Defence League and five time winner of *Witch Weekly* 's Most-Charming-Smile award, don't you agree?"

Harry felt slightly blinded when Lockhart gave him a hearty wink.

"I actually wondered if you asked your Muggle guardian to speak for you because you felt jealous!" Lockhart continued, wagging a manicured, soft-skinned finger, "Harry, Harry, Harry-if you did, and I don't blame you if you did- you have to realize jealousy won't take you far. You have to build your *own* name first, your own image, not tear down someone else's! Now I know what you're thinking: *it's easy for him, he's already famous.* Harry, Harry, *Harry*… when I was your age, I was nothing. It was hard work, building myself to this point from nothing. You can't blame me for wanting to defend myself, can you?"

Harry didn't know how he was supposed to respond to that, so he didn't. Lockhart mercifully shooed him off after giving him another wink. Harry took the seat at the very back and stacked all of seven Lockhart books in front of him so he could avoid looking at the author. Ron joined him.

"You looked like you had a concussion," said Ron. "Hopefully Malfoy won't ever see you with Lockhart, or he'll have all the slander fodder

to last a lifetime."

"Don't give him ideas," Harry snapped. The last thing he needed was Malfoy having more ammunition.

Class went downhill from there.

Lockhart's introduction of himself was pretty much a rehash of what he said to Harry, except he mentioned Brandon Banshee at some point. Harry stop paying attention the moment Lockhart picked up Neville's copy of *Travels with Trolls* and showed them his own, winking portrait on the cover and said: "Me." Harry was forced to pay attention again when Lockhart handed out a Quiz that consisted of questions like: *What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favourite colour?* and *when is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday?* Harry just sat there staring at it, wondering the purpose of this. He half-heartedly scribbled down *peacock blue* for question one when Hermione glared at him, but afterwards something in Harry flopped over and fainted so he didn't continue. Lockhart collected the quizzes thirty minutes later. He rifled through the answers and tutted at the person who only managed to fill out one question and got it wrong. Harry didn't raise his hand when Lockhart asked the person to reveal himself.

Then in the spirit of facing the dark and unknown or something along those lines, Lockhart set loose a cage of freshly captured Cornish pixies.

It was a pandemonium. The pixies shot out the cage like so many electric-blue rockets. Two of them seized Neville by the ears and lifted him up into the air. Another pair smashed themselves out through a window, scattering glass everywhere. Three dragged Lavender by the hair, one bit Ron's nose, and the rest destroyed the classroom more effectively than a rampaging rhino. They grabbed ink bottles and sprayed the class with it, shredded books and papers, upended waste bins, tore down the photographs, and grabbed books and bags and threw them out of the smashed windows. In minutes half of the class was cowering under desks and Neville was swinging from the iron chandelier on the ceiling.

"Come on now-round them up, round them up, they're just pixies," Lockhart shouted. He rolled up his sleeves and bellowed: "

Peskipiksi Pesternomi! "

It had absolutely no effect. Two pixies grabbed Lockhart's wand and threw it out of the window. Lockhart gulped and dove under his own desk, narrowly avoiding being squashed by Neville, who lost his grip.

Then Harry, who was among the few still standing, and until that point was just staring at the unfolding chaos whilst being pelted by torn pieces of paper and debris, had enough. He saw the clever freezing-charm Hermione was using to immobilize two pixies and decided to use a charm Sherlock had desperately wanted Harry to try at a crime scene.

" *Stasis Omnibus Pixie.* "

Everything stopped. The pixies froze and floated mid-air like winged, blue, eight-inch long Christmas lights hanging on invisible strings. All you could hear was the creaking of the iron chandelier above and an odd sheet of paper fluttering to the ground.

Lockhart peered up from beneath his desk.

"Ah," he said, staring at the frozen pixies and giving Harry a swift, but genuinely terrified look, "Well, that was…"

The bell rang and there was a mad rush for the exit. Lockhart straightened himself up in the fresh set of chaos. He caught Harry, Ron and Hermione at the door and said, "Well, I'll ask you three to clean up." Then he swept past them and closed the door behind him.

"Can you *believe* him?" roared Ron, as he stuffed six immobilized pixies back into their cage.

"He just wants to give us hands on experience," said Hermione, using a repairing charm on the shattered windows.

"Hands on?" said Harry, who was trying to grab a pixie just out of his reach, "Hermione, he had no idea what he was doing!"

"Rubbish," said Hermione, "you read his books-look at all the

amazing things he's done-"

"What he *says* he's done," Ron muttered. "You know, I reckon Sherlock is right about him."

He and Hermione bickered about this all the way down to the entrance hall. Harry, who was fast getting tired of the argument, told them to go ahead, he had to talk to Blippy.

"You're really taking good care of that girl," said Ron slyly.

"Oh, shut up," Harry grumbled. He wanted to explain himself, but he didn't think Ron or Hermione, who never had psychosomatic food problems and had never been starved, could understand that he felt cold and clammy whenever he smelled pork and that he felt sympathetic hunger pangs whenever he met a starving person because the Dursleys second most favourite punishment for him was withholding meals.

So he didn't. He just shooed them off.

Harry spent a lot of time over the next few days dodging out of sight whenever he saw Lockhart in the corridors. It was difficult because Lockhart kept trying to corner him. Terry Boot, his friend from Ravenclaw, told Harry in the middle of the week Lockhart had unleashed the Cornish pixies at his first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson. Lockhart cast the stasis charm Harry had used instead of the *Peskipiksi Persternomi*, only he didn't do it correctly and the unaffected pixies wrecked the Defence classroom again.

"I think he isn't used to casting the spell in front of an audience," said Terry generously. "I mean, he said he used the charm for *years*…"

Harry seriously doubted this. He had found the charm in *Star Wars, a Guide to Blending Science and Magic for Witches and Wizards*, and it wasn't a popular book because most people from magic families had neither knowledge nor interest in Muggle culture (Mr. Weasley being the notable exception). Besides, if Lockhart *did* know the spell, he wouldn't have used the *Peskipiksi* spell on Harry's first

day.

Ron's wand further deteriorated over the week. Regular percussion therapy did nothing to fix it. More cracks splintered down from the broken tip and the range of malfunction increased with it, finally surpassing itself on Friday by shooting out of Ron's hand and hitting tiny little Professor Flitwick between the eyes, leaving a festering boil right where it hit him.

All in all, Harry was glad classes were over for the week as they left Charms. He was looking forward to a leisurely visit to Hagrid's in the afternoon after lunch, but then he got a text that gave him a strong, pointless urge to swear.

Music lessons this afternoon. Be there. I will know if you weren't. SH

"They're really not giving up on this, are they?" said Ron as he read the text over Harry's shoulder. "How many teachers did you go through so far? Five?"

" *Six*," growled Harry. Feeling distinctly rebellious, he replied: *Why should I?*

Sherlock sent a picture message. Harry choked when he saw the attachment. He quickly deleted it before either Ron or Hermione could properly see.

I will send this to Snape. SH

U r a nasty & evil prson, Harry typed savagely.

I know. SH

Harry put his phone away, scowling. Ron looked like he was trying very hard not to laugh and Hermione had a 'what-did-you-expect' face.

"You know, Harry, if you actually *practiced* it wouldn't be so bad," said Hermione.

"I *did* practice," Harry lied. "It's not my fault I've got no talent for music…"

They walked across the entrance hall. There was a small knot of people gathered around the notice board, reading a piece of parchment that had been pinned up. Justin Finch-Fletchley and Ernie Macmillan beckoned them over.

"They're starting music classes!" said Justin, "First class this afternoon at four o' clock, all genres and instruments welcomed! What do you think? I always wanted to play the electric guitar, but father insisted on classical music…"

"There're guitars that run on *electricity* ?" said Ron, bemused but fascinated. "How does that even work?"

"Maybe we'll learn about wizarding music?" Hermione speculated. "I read about the *Incipio Musica* charm…"

Harry suddenly realized what Sherlock meant by music lessons and felt his spirit lift up a bit.

"No, its regular music lessons," said Harry. "I think I know the teacher. She's good."

That made Ron and Hermione's interest even keener. The three of them agreed to go to the new music classroom at four. Twenty or so students were present when they got there, and were examining the many available instruments. Justin and Ernie were there, and so was Julia. There was also a mousy first-year boy Harry swore was following him everywhere. A few teachers were present too, including (Harry did a double-take) Albus Dumbledore.

"Even Dumbledore is here!" Hermione squealed. "Who is she, Harry? What is she like?"

"It's Miss Jackie. She-"Harry began, but he didn't finish. A small young woman entered the chamber noiselessly and approached the small crowd, looking both unassuming and odd wearing black open-toe heals, black slacks and a white button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

Miss Jackie surveyed the diverse group of people, many whom weren't very impressed at what they were seeing. Small and fragile-

looking, Miss Jackie gave the impression of a person who failed to thrive and had just recovered from a long bout of illness. Miss Jackie told them her name and then gave them all a small smile.

"Before I get into the meat of the lesson, I'd like to do a practical demo," said Miss Jackie in gentle voice. "So if everyone can be so kind as to participate… no, no." She smiled again when a couple of third year Ravenclaw girls twittered nervously. "I'm not going to ask you to play a Nocturne by Frédéric Chopin. I only ask you to be patient."

Miss Jackie raised a small, square paper placard with a white circle inside.

"I have some cards," she said. "All you have to do is play your assigned sound in repeat when the circle turns green, and stop when the circle turns white again."

Harry felt curious. What was Miss Jackie trying to do? And what kind of sound were they supposed to play? Was it going to be hard?

Miss Jackie went to a nearby piano and wrapped the keyboard cover against the face several times in a consistent beat.

"Can you do that?" she asked to Ron.

Ron nodded and took the card Miss Jackie handed over to him, looking terribly bemused.

Miss Jackie went around like that, asking a third-year boy to drum the backside of a cello with his palms, a fourth-year girl to pluck three strings on a grand piano in a certain order, and so on. Nothing complicated, except no one had any idea what she was up to. Not everyone got a sound assigned to them either- Miss Jackie just told them they'd know what to do when their time came as she gave out the cards. Finally, she whispered something into Dumbledore's ear and Dumbledore beamed.

"Okay, all set," said Miss Jackie, now standing behind a grand piano, hands on the keys, "Now off we go."

The fourth-year girl was first. She plucked the piano strings as

instructed. In a few seconds, another student flicked a different set of piano strings. Then the third-year boy started drumming. Miss Jackie started plinking a simple tune with one key. More people joined in with their sounds as their circles turned green. The simple tunes all blended together, creating a richer sound.

Then suddenly, everyone realized they were playing a discernible melody. Everyone stared at each other in awe as Miss Jackie started *embellishing* the tune they were already playing on the piano. Everything worked together, the drumming of the cello, the flicking of piano strings, and the sawing a single harp string with a bow. Even Ron's rhythmic wrapping of the keyboard cover brought a unique beat. Everyone was bobbing their heads and those who didn't have a sound assigned to them started clapping. The boy assigned to drum the cello started to improvise. Miss Jackie's piano playing got ever more playful and mischievous-fingers flying across the keyboard in effortless grace, her long black hair swishing and beaming hugely, it looked more like she was dancing than playing.

Then Dumbledore raised his wand and flicked out a ribbon that formed the following words:

Hogwarts! Hogwarts! Hoggy Warty Hogwarts!

Teach us something, please,

Whether we be old and bald

Or young with scabby knees,

Our heads could do with filling

With some interesting stuff,

For now they're bare and full of air,

Dead flies and bits of fluff,

So teach us things worth knowing,

Bring back what we've forgot,

Just do your best, we'll do the rest,

And learn until our brains all rot.

Soon they were all singing the school song along to the tune. There was no need to pay attention to their cards anymore-everyone just carried on and sang in gusto, amazed at what they were doing.

At length they came to a natural stop, and everyone burst into a long, thunderous applause.

"You were all so wonderful," said Miss Jackie earnestly at the end, "You're an amazingly talented group."

"Can we do another one?" asked the third-year boy eagerly.

"Did you write the song yourself?" piped a first-year.

Miss Jackie made calming gestures while glowing pink. When the students settled down, she resumed speaking.

"The purpose of this demo was to show you playing music is more than just hitting the right note at the right time," said Miss Jackie. "But here is the more important question: did you have fun?"

The yes was universal. Miss Jackie smiled again.

"Good. Because playing music should be *fun* . Whether you're experiencing the fun at the moment or you're looking forward to the fun you'll have in the future as you're going through the drudgery of practice, playing music ought to be *fun* . I want you to remember that above all else.

"That said," said Miss Jackie. "I think we can now start talking about instruments. Those of you who have some idea of what you want to play-and remember voice is a perfectly fine option- please follow the other me."

Then as calmly as you please, Miss Jackie multiplied herself into two. The duplicate walked over to a corner, beckoning the students to follow after her/it. A large subset of students went, many with their jaws hanging open.

"The rest of you can come here," said Miss Jackie.

Harry, Ron, Hermione, the mousy first-year and Dumbledore went over to Miss Jackie.

"Good to see you, Headmaster, Ron, Harry, Hermione," said Miss Jackie warmly. Then she turned to the firstie. "What is your name?"

"I- I'm Colin Creevey," said the little boy.

"Is this your first year at Hogwarts?"

"Yes," said Colin breathlessly. "It's *amazing* here. I never knew the odd stuff I could do was magic until I got my Hogwarts letter. My dad is a deliveryman, he couldn't believe it either. I was going to take loads of pictures and send it to him, but-" he drooped a little, "my camera doesn't work here. A boy in my dormitory said electronics don't work in Hogwarts so I need to find an old analogue one. But he also said if I develop the film in the right potion, the pictures will *move* ."

Dumbledore and Miss Jackie smiled indulgently as Colin babbled on. When he finished, Miss Jackie spoke to all of them.

"Today I'm going to help you choose an instrument," she said. "There is a wide range to choose from, and you want to start with something you can enjoy. Does anyone have an instrument they like the sound of?"

Hermione raised her hand.

"I always like the sound of a flute," she said.

"Okay," said Miss Jackie. "Do you have any respiratory problems?"

Hermione looked startled. Miss Jackie rubbed the back of her head apologetically.

"Sorry, but I had to ask. It's not that people who have respiratory problems like asthma aren't allowed to play wind instruments, but I do have to teach them how to work around it."

Hermione reported no problems. Miss Jackie picked up a flute from the towering shelf full of wind instruments and played something Harry heard before (*Méditation of Thais,* he later learned). After Hermione confirmed that this was the sound she had in mind, Miss Jackie moved onto Ron.

"Dunno," said Ron. "Never really thought about it until today…"

Miss Jackie's dark eyes twinkled.

"Show me your hand."

Ron raised his right hand, bewildered. Miss Jackie placed her left hand against it, finger to finger, palm to palm. Their hands were roughly the same size.

"You have big hands and you're not even done growing," said Miss Jackie. "Having a large hand-span is great advantage for a pianist. I personally find men who play the piano very attractive. Would you like to try?"

"Uh, sure," said Ron, turning pink around the ears.

"Are you really?" asked Miss Jackie. "Piano is easy enough to pick up, but not an easy instrument to keep on going with. It gets difficult very quickly, and a lot people give up too soon."

Ron shrugged his shoulders. Miss Jackie went from examining Ron's hand to checking his forearms.

"You know, with a bit of training, you might be able to play a piece I could never do justice," Miss Jackie remarked. "You have the right forearms."

Ron frowned. "What do my forearms have anything to do with playing the piano?"

Miss Jackie demonstrated. Not in a million years did Harry think *smashing your forearm across the keys* was a legitimate method of playing the piano, or that it could sound okay under any circumstances, but the forearm smashing was critical for the piece's *climax* . As for the piece itself, it was so uplifting Harry felt like he

could go and conquer something.

"You really think I can do that?" asked Ron excitedly.

"Well, yes," said Miss Jackie, as if she was surprised Ron would doubt it. Thus sold, Ron decided to go ahead.

The five of them took a short break to listen to Miss Jackie's duplicate play *Pirates of the Caribbean* 's main theme; how she could hit so many chords without missing a note or run her thumb up and down the keys without breaking it, Harry didn't know. The clone ended the number by *sitting* on the lower end of the keyboard with a flourish-and it sounded just right.

"You play the piano better with your posterior than I do with my fingers," said Dumbledore, shaking his head.

"Please, sir," said Miss Jackie, covering her reddening face behind her hand.

She moved onto Colin. Colin quickly confessed to only visiting out of curiosity and not to actually learn music. Miss Jackie didn't seem to mind that, and moved onto Dumbledore.

"I used to play the fiddle in my youth," said Dumbledore. "But that was many years ago, and I'm quite eager to try something new."

"Anything you fancy, sir?"

"I don't particularly care which instrument as long as you think I can rightly handle it in my old age. I'm convinced you can make everything sound perfectly lovely, be it penny whistle, highland bagpipe or spoons."

Miss Jackie covered her face behind both hands.

"Everything has their time and context, sir," she said in small voice, peeking behind her hands. "But since you mentioned a whistle, perhaps you'd like to try something like this?"

She played the Hobbit/Shire theme from the Lord of the Rings movie. Dumbledore was misty-eyed at the end of it and gave her a

wordless thumps-up.

Only Harry was left. He felt both excited and apprehensive.

"I hope you're not here by coercion alone," said Miss Jackie gently. "It's really fine if you don't want to."

Harry smiled nervously. "As long as it's not cello…"

"Too many bad memories?"

Memories of his past teachers marched through Harry's head and he shuddered. Miss Jackie chuckled.

"Do you have a favourite song or piece?" asked Miss Jackie.

"I have a playlist," said Harry, holding up his phone.

Miss Jackie went through it. "You have a lot of instrumentals."

"It helps me sleep," said Harry.

Miss Jackie flicked her glance briefly at Harry before going back to the list. Dumbledore was studying him, too, and Harry had a feeling he was being x-rayed.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said Miss Jackie. "But it seems like you're more about pieces than you are about specific instruments."

Harry nodded.

"Then you want to start with something versatile, something that can handle a lot of different compositions," said Miss Jackie. "Piano is always an option, and so is the guitar. Greg told me you liked it, yes?"

"Yes, but…"

"Sherlock doesn't?"

Harry shook his head miserably. Miss Jackie studied him for moment, considering and weighing.

"What do you think about the violin?" she asked.

Harry thought of midnight caterwauling and brooding, melancholy solos. His feelings about these must have been clear on his face because Miss Jackie smiled ruefully.

"Don't let bad memories of an instrument hinder you," she said. "The violin and cello are wonderfully versatile instruments, and they can make the most beautiful sounds."

If they could, Harry never heard it, certainly not from Sherlock. Well, he heard some impressive cello music from Miss Jackie back in the bowling alley, but…

"Do you know John's most favourite piece of classical music?"

"Pachelbel's Canon," said Harry promptly.

Miss Jackie nodded. "Let's try playing it with different instruments and see which one you like best."

Harry agreed.

Miss Jackie played the George Winston's rendition of Pachelbel's Canon on the piano first. It was touching and felt *clean*, but Harry would rather listen to it again at night than play it himself. The cello version left people dancing about, but Harry still had reservations against the cello (maybe later-it was so much fun!).

Then Miss Jackie picked up the violin.

Without a doubt, the violin version was the simplest. But something about the sound seemed to reach deep into his soul and stir something raw and alive. Harry forgot where he was and just listened.

There was no applause at the end of this piece. Just a silence that spoke more eloquently than cheers ever could.

Miss Jacqueline lowered the violin.

"What do you think?"

Harry dimly noted his eyes were wet. He just nodded.

Miss Jackie nodded back and simply said, "Okay."

Final Notes : Harry does not like Lockhart's male cattle excrement. I was horrified and amused at the ease in which I could conjure up Lockhart's speech patterns. Did JKR feel this way when she wrote CS? I wonder…

Ron gets to play piano because he has big hands and feet, and like Jon Schmidt of the Piano Guys, has red hair. ;-) Left on his own devices, Harry would no doubt pick the guitar. I just wanted to mess things around a bit and threw the violin in.

Sherlock's mini lecture is based on the advice from John C. Bogle, the genius who created the first index fund (Vanguard 500 Index Fund), and several finance/investment classics including but not limited to: *Intelligent Investor* by Benjamin Graham (mentor of Warren Buffet), *A Random Walk Down Wall Street* by Burton Malkiel, and *Your Money or Your Life* by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin. I did not include anything that I haven't tried myself as a private investor and didn't produce good results. I also consulted a couple of online investment calculators to make sure the examples are as accurate as possible. Sherlock rounded off the numbers and didn't talk about taxes and regulations because even *he* knows it would fly over a twelve year old boy's head.

Wand Woes

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Two: Wand Woes

In no time at all, violin lessons became an integral part of Harry's routine. Learning how to play a violin was as difficult as learning how to play a cello, but unlike Mr. Sigered, who exploded in anger whenever Harry kept doing same wrong thing, or Mrs. Lachlan, who made Harry do repetitive and deeply boring exercises before leaving to take care of someone else, Miss Jackie stayed for the entire lesson and listened to his (terrible) efforts patiently.

"Don't worry about it," said Miss Jackie after enduring fifteen minutes of Harry producing the most embarrassing, cringe-worthy screeches, "making sound on a violin takes *time* . You're getting there."

Slowly, Harry progressed from making ear throbbing screeches or no sound at all without any clue as to why to consistently playing full octaves without dropping any notes. The notes themselves sounded dull and uninspiring, but Miss Jackie was very happy with the progress. So Harry felt hopeful of his prospects as a violinist.

Harry wished he could say he was making the same slow but steady progress in increasing his endurance as a Quidditch player. Unfortunately, his health had not improved since last year. He discovered that in the subsequent practices following the memorable

first one.

Harry's first Quidditch practice happened on the first Saturday of the term. It more or less started when Oliver Wood, the Gryffindor Quidditch team captain, shook him awake.

"Whassamater?" said Harry groggily.

"Quidditch Practice," said Wood. "Come on!"

Harry squinted at the window. A mist was still hanging over the pink-and-gold sky and the birds were making their morning racket.

"Oliver," Harry croaked. "It's the crack of dawn."

"Exactly," said Wood, his eyes gleaming with crazed enthusiasm. "This is part of our new training program. None of the other teams have started training yet. We're going to be first off the mark this year. Now come on, grab your broom and let's go."

Yawning and shivering, Harry got out of bed to search for his Quidditch robes.

"Good man," said Wood, "Meet you at the pitch in fifteen minutes."

When he found his scarlet team robes and pulled on his thermal jacket for warmth, Harry scribbled a note to Ron explaining where he'd gone and went down the spiral staircase to the common room, carrying his Nimbus on his shoulder. He almost made it to the portrait hole when there was a clatter behind him and Colin Creevey came dashing down the spiral staircase, an old analogue camera hanging ominously on his neck.

"I heard someone saying your name from the stairs, Harry! Look, my Dad finally sent me an analogue camera. Do you think you can take a picture with me?"

"Ummm… no," said Harry, the memory of Colin ambushing him after the previous afternoon's music lessons still fresh in his mind. Colin, who Harry was almost certain was stalking him, had warbled how he knew all about Harry, how he survived when Voldemort tried to kill him, then made him disappear, and Harry still had a lightning-bolt

scar on his forehead and a strange ability to make electronics work in Hogwarts since the incident (the last bit took Harry by surprise; since when did the students of Hogwarts start thinking this?). Then he asked Harry if he could take a picture with him. Further startled, Harry asked why, and Colin said it was to prove he really met him. Harry declined, explaining to Colin he *didn't* have the ability to make digital cameras work in Hogwarts. Apparently Colin was not deterred by such pesky things. "Sorry, Colin, I have to go. Quidditch practice…"

Harry really should have expected the reaction:

"Oh, wow! Wait for me! I've never seen a Quidditch game before!" said Colin as he scrambled through the portrait hole after him.

Colin questioned Harry on Quidditch all the way down to the entrance hall and across the sloping lawn. Harry didn't know how to the get rid of him. It was like having an extremely talkative shadow. Harry only shook him off at the stadium; Colin had called out in a piping voice, "I'll go and get a good seat, Harry!" and hurried off to the stands.

His team mates were already in the changing rooms when Harry entered. Fred and George Weasley were puffy-eyed and tousle-haired, and the three Chasers, Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson, kept nodding off. Wood, who was the only one truly awake, proceeded to go through three diagrams explaining the new tactics he'd formulated over the summer, spending twenty minutes per diagram. Fred's head drooped right on Alicia's shoulder while Wood went over the first diagrams and he stared to snore.

"So," said Wood at long last, jerking Harry from his wistful fantasy about what he could be eating for breakfast at the castle. "Is that clear? Any questions?"

"I have a question," said George, who had woken with a start. "Why couldn't you have told us this yesterday when we were awake?"

Wood was displeased.

"Listen you lot," he said, glowering at them all, "We should've won

the Quidditch cup last year. We're easily the best team. But unfortunately-owing to a terrible misunderstanding-"

Harry shifted in his seat. Harry had spent fifty minutes of his allotted sixty flying around with his team mates before the match against Ravenclaw, thinking Madam Pomfrey's one hour restriction only pertained to Quidditch and not flying general. Thus he was taken off the game in ten minutes, despite Wood and Harry's howls of protest. The team was forced to play with one player short and suffered their worst defeat in three hundred seventy years.

Wood took a moment to regain control over himself. Their last defeat was clearly still torturing him.

"So this year we're going to train harder than ever before… and we're going to finish *every single game* within an hour! Now let's go and put our theories into practice!" Wood shouted. He seized his broomstick and led the way out. His team mates followed, stiff-kneed and yawning.

They've been in the changing room for so long the sun had risen completely, though remnants of the mist were still clinging around the grass. As Harry walked onto the pitch, he saw Ron and Hermione sitting on the stands.

"Aren't you finished yet?" called Ron incredulously.

"Haven't even started," said Harry, looking jealously at the toast and marmalade Ron and Hermione brought out from the Great Hall. "Wood was showing us new moves."

Harry pulled out his own 'new move' from his pocket as his team mates mounted their brooms.

"What is that?" asked Wood.

"A face mask," said Harry as he pulled the mask John stitched up using a black Polyester shirt over his head. "My Muggle Mum figured flying is a lot like skiing, so if I avoid direct wind contact, I could probably play longer."

Harry devoutly hoped Wood wasn't going to kiss him because he

looked like he wanted to. To avoid the possibility, Harry quickly mounted his broomstick and kicked at the ground, soaring into air. The cool morning air whipped the parts of his face that were still exposed, which was around the eyes and nostrils, waking him up more effectively than Wood's long talk. It felt wonderful to be back on the Quidditch pitch. He flew right around the stadium at full speed, racing Fred and George, and felt triumphant when his lungs didn't ache.

"What's that funny clicking noise?" called Fred as they hurtled around the corner.

Harry looked into the stands. Colin was sitting in one of the highest seats taking picture after picture, the shutter sound of his raised camera strangely magnified in the deserted stadium.

"Look this way, Harry! This way!" he cried shrilly.

"Who is that?" said Fred.

"Somebody," said Harry, putting on a spurt of speed that took him as far away as possible from Colin.

"What's going on?" said Wood, frowning, as he skimmed through the air toward them. "Why is that first year taking pictures? He could be a Slytherin spy, trying to find out about our new training program."

"He's in Gryffindor," said Harry quickly.

"And the Slytherins don't need a spy, Oliver," said George.

"Why is that?" asked Wood testily.

"Because they're here in person," said George, pointing.

Several wizards in green robes were walking onto the field, broomsticks in their hands.

"I don't believe this!" Wood hissed in outrage. "I booked the pitch for today! We'll see about this."

They did, eventually. Flint, the Slytherin Quidditch team captain,

showed the Gryffindors the permission slip Professor Snape gave him to use the Quidditch pitch to train their new Seeker, Draco Malfoy, and the seven new Nimbus brooms Lucius Malfoy had bought for them-the latest model, only came out last month, and according to Flint, they outstripped Harry's own Nimbus by a considerable amount.

"Good, aren't they?" said Malfoy smoothly, when Ron gaped, open-mouthed, at the seven superb broomsticks. "But perhaps Gryffindor team will be able to raise some gold and get new brooms, too. You could raffle off those Cleansweep fives; I expect a museum would bid for them."

The Slytherin team howled with laughter.

"At least no one on the Gryffindor team had to *buy* their way in," said Hermione sharply. " *They* got in on pure talent."

The smug look on Malfoy's face flickered.

"No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood," he spat.

Harry finally knew how bad of a word 'Mudblood' was because there was an instant uproar. Flint had to dive in front of Malfoy to stop Fred and George from jumping him, Alicia shrieked " *How dare you!* ", and Ron plunged his hand into his robes, pulled out his wand, yelling, "You'll pay for that one, Malfoy!" and pointed it furiously under Flint's arm at Malfoy's face.

A loud bang echoed around the stadium and a jet of green light shot out of the wrong end of Ron's wand, which was spellotaped to stop further damage. The light hit him in the stomach and sent him reeling backward onto the grass.

"Ron! Ron! Are you all right?" squealed Hermione.

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead he gave a mighty belch and several slugs dribbled out of his mouth onto his lap.

The Slytherin team members were paralyzed with laughter. Flint was doubled up, hanging onto his new broomstick for support. Malfoy

was on all fours, fist banging the ground. The Gryffindors were gathered around Ron, who kept belching large, glistening slugs. Nobody seemed to want to touch him.

"Let's go to Hagrid's, it's nearest," said Harry to Hermione, who nodded bravely, and the pair of them pulled Ron up by the arms. Colin, who had run down from his seat and was now staring at Ron, camera raised and fascinated, said: "Oooh, can you hold him still, Harry?"

"Get of the way, Colin!" Harry snarled, and Colin jumped out of the away.

He and Hermione supported Ron out of the stadium and across the grounds towards the edge of the forest. There they saw Lockhart, dressed in mauve (*why!* ?), leaving Hagrid's cabin. Harry didn't want to deal with him, so he directed them to duck behind a nearby bush, and Hermione followed reluctantly. Once the coast was clear, they urgently knocked on the door. Hagrid appeared at once, looking very grumpy, but his expression brightened to moment he realized who it was.

"Bin wonderin' when you'd come ter see me. Come in, come in- thought you were Professor Lockhart-"

Harry and Hermione supported Ron into the one-roomed cabin. Hagrid wasn't perturbed by Ron's slug problem, which Harry explained as he lowered Ron to a chair.

"Better out than in," said Hagrid cheerfully, plunking a large copper basin in front of Ron, "Get'em all out, Ron."

Hagrid bustled about preparing tea as Ron heaved into the basin. When Harry asked why Lockhart was hanging around, Hagrid growled Lockhart trying to tell him how to keep Kelpies out of a well, as if anyone who didn't read *Fantastic Beast and Where to Find Them* as a first year wouldn't know, and banged about a banshee he banished. Hagrid swore if one word of it was true, he'd eat is kettle (Harry privately thought Hagrid was in no danger of eating kettles). Then Hagrid asked who Ron was trying to curse. This led to the subject of the word 'Mudblood'.

"It's about the most insulting thing he could think of," gasped Ron, after Hagrid reacted in outrage, "Mudblood is a really foul name for someone who's Muggle-born. There are wizards like Malfoy's family who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood. I mean the rest of us know it doesn't make any difference. Look at Neville Longbottom-he's pure-blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up."

"An' they still haven't invented a spell our Hermione can' do," said Hagrid proudly, making Hermione go a brilliant shade of magenta.

"It's a disgusting thing to call someone," said Ron, wiping his sweaty brow with a shaking hand. "Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It's ridiculous. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn't married Muggles we'd've died out."

He retched and ducked out of sight again.

"Well, I don' blame yeh fer tryin' to curse him, Ron," said Hagrid loudly over the thuds of more slugs hitting the basin. "Bu' maybe it's a good thing yer wand backfired. 'Spect Lucius Malfoy would've come marchin' up ter school if yeh'd cursed his son. Least yer not in trouble."

Harry would've pointed out that trouble didn't come much worse than having slugs pouring out of your mouth, but he couldn't; Hagrid's treacle fudge had cemented his jaws together. Harry then had more reasons to keep this opinion to himself. After the first two weeks of successful full-length Quidditch practices, a damp chill fell upon the grounds and seeped into the castle. Madam Pomfrey was kept busy by a spate of colds among the students and staff. Her pepper-up potion worked instantly, but it left the drinker smoking at the ears for several hours. Harry gained a stuffy-nose and a persistent dull headache as raindrops the size of bullets thundered on the castle windows for days on end. Neither of these things dampened Oliver Wood's enthusiasm for regular training sessions, however, which was why Harry, drenched to the skin far too often, caught pneumonia.

Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey's rage knew no bounds when Harry was carried into the Hospital Wing running a high fever

and a racking cough. After putting Oliver in several detentions for irresponsibility, Madam Pomfrey banned Harry from all future Quidditch practices until it stopped raining and his health recovered. That was the first half of the bad news. The second half came from Fred and George, who had been spying on the Slytherin team. They reported the speed of the new Nimbus broomsticks were such that the Slytherins looked nothing more than seven greenish blurs, shooting through the air like missiles.

Harry complained about it to John after he got over his pneumonia (three day turnover verses the two to three *week* turnover of Muggle medicine; wizard healing may be medieval, but it was extremely effective).

"Harry, water-repelling charms exist for a reason," rumbled Sherlock in the background.

"Sherlock, not now," John scolded, while Harry smacked his forehead for not thinking it himself. "Harry, if you catch the snitch before the other team's Chasers can score more than a hundred and fifty points, does it *matter* how fast their brooms are?"

"No," said Harry.

"There you go then," said John sensibly. "You just focus on catching that snitch within an hour and keeping yourself as warm and dry as possible. You know, I've been thinking: wouldn't it be cool if you built a reputation of finishing *all* your games in an hour? Flying is exciting and all, but three week long games sound miserable to me. Let's keep things sweet and British, I say."

Thus Harry was in a cautiously optimistic mood when he paid his sixth visit to Hospital wing in the company of Ginny Weasley. Ginny had been looking pale, so Percy bullied her into joining Harry to get some Pepper-up potion too. The steam coming out from her vivid red hair gave the impression her whole head was on fire.

"Feeling better?" asked Harry.

Ginny nodded wordlessly, and tripped over a couple of stairs for that moment of inattention. Harry pretended not to notice. Talking to

Ginny was a bit like talking to Neville-as soon as the thing that was making them self-conscious was gone or they got acclimatized to it, they were perfectly fine. Ginny was certainly talkative and out-going when she thought Harry wasn't looking. Harry hoped she'd get over this strange bout of shyness soon-he didn't want any of the Weasleys to feel awkward towards him.

"Do you have any ideas on what to do with our match against Slytherin?" Harry prattled to fill up the silence, "We could definitely use a reserve team… would you be interested in trying out?"

Again, Ginny nodded without saying anything. But it was a start.

"Do you play Quidditch with your brothers?"

"They don't even ask me join," Ginny huffed. Then she turned tomato-red like she said too much.

Harry continued his policy of complete blindness towards any and all awkwardness.

"You know how to fly a broom, though."

"I've been breaking into the shed and flying my brothers' brooms since I was six," said Ginny, still blushing.

"I reckon we could work around the first year rule," said Harry. "It's just *brooms* first years aren't allowed to have, after all. Nothing stops you from borrowing one-a team broom, I mean." He added the last bit hastily. "Er, what is your favourite Quidditch team?"

Ginny said she liked the Holyhead Harpies, and from there Harry could ease the conversation into asking her about the team and why she liked them. Ginny was a lot more comfortable and less prone to knocking things over when they talked about Quidditch. Harry kept that in mind for future reference as he bade her farewell at the fourth floor so he could meet his Hufflepuff friends in the library. He and Justin Finch-Fletchley continued their weekly meet-ups from last year, and now it included Justin's friends Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbot, plus Hannah's friend Susan Bones whenever she had the time.

Harry tried not to make a noise when he entered the muffled stillness of the library. Madam Pince, the librarian, was a thin, irritable woman who looked like an underfed vulture. She glared at Harry and his smoking ears, probably displeased at the possible damage the steam was inflicting upon her precious books, but she didn't say anything because-well, what *could* she say?

He found the familiar group of four in the usual corner: curly-haired Justin, the stout Ernie, Hannah and her blonde hair in pigtails, and Susan in hair done in a long French braid.

"Did you get *another* cold?" asked Justin incredulously after greeting him.

"I don't think the first one really went away, no matter what Madam Pomfrey says," Harry grumbled. "She's threatening to reserve a bed for my use only if I get another one before Hallowe'en."

"I thought you already had your own bed," Susan teased.

"Nope, I haven't fallen that far," said Harry.

They worked on their Herbology essays and chatted quietly. Susan returned Harry's copy of *The Hobbit* she'd borrowed two weeks ago, and said it was very charming. Harry mentioned its sequel *The Lord of the Rings* and Susan showed definite interested in reading the trilogy. Justin and Harry talked about the latest Dr. Who episode before reverting to more wizard-friendly topics like latest songs on the WWN (Wizarding Wireless Network). Harry knew very little about the WWN and what it broadcast, but that was fine; he didn't mind just listening.

When they left the Library for dinner, Hannah and Ernie took Harry aside to have a word.

"Could you let one of our first years borrow your phone?" Hannah asked nervously.

"Who is it?" asked Harry. He didn't lend his phone willy-nilly these days, not since Malfoy destroyed his old one.

"Julia Lestrade," said Ernie. "She's a Muggle-raised half-blood. She

wants to talk to her Dad badly, but he's a Muggle, so he doesn't know much about our world."

"Okay," said Harry. "When is a good time?"

"How about after dinner? Where should we tell her to go?"

"Tell her to meet me at the trophy room on the third floor, it's usually empty."

The three of them talked about Julia as they headed to the Great Hall. Apparently Julia was having trouble with most of her classes, particularly Charms and Transfiguration.

"No offence, but she reminds me of Neville Longbottom," said Ernie. "It's been over a month and she *still* can't get her wand to work properly, and I was expecting something more from the Grandmaster's granddaughter."

"Why do people keep calling her that?" asked Harry.

"Because she *is*," said Ernie pompously. "Her grandfather Shin June Hu is called the Grandmaster because he's the only wizard in the world who can do all types of magic without a wand. Even Dumbledore can't do that."

Harry gaped. All this time he'd thought Mr. Shin was just an ordinary old man who incidentally was a wizard. He certainly didn't *look* like an equal to Albus Dumbledore; whereas Dumbledore seem to personify the word 'wizard' wherever he was, Mr. Shin could easily lose himself in a sea of Muggles and none the wiser. But then again, all of the magic Mr. Shin performed at Diagon Alley was done without a wand, and they were pretty impressive feats of magic. Harry never dreamed that this was a one-of-a-kind sort of thing.

"She's not *exactly* like Neville, though," said Hannah, "She doesn't have any problems finishing the written assignments and she's *really* good at Potions and Herbology. I heard Professor Snape said she had the knack."

"… Shut up," said Harry, more shocked at this bit news than the one about Julia's grandfather. He never heard of Snape complimenting

someone outside of his own Slytherin house, whom he always favoured.

"I know, I couldn't believe it either," said Ernie, shaking his head. "But then her grandfather is the *Grandmaster* . I guess that makes her an exception."

The three of them separated inside the Great Hall, Ernie and Hannah joining their fellow Hufflepuffs and Harry his Gryffindors. Ron apparently just returned from his Piano lessons; he looked wrung out.

"I'm starting to *hate* Czerny," said Ron, scowling. "If I ever see him, I'm going to kill him."

"Too bad he's already dead, then," said Harry, suppressing a smile.

"Yeah, just my luck," Ron grumbled as he savagely attacked his plate of black pudding.

Harry ate bubble and squeak that was a lot greener than the way he preferred it ("Vitamins, Harry. They're frequently dressed in green. They make you stronger and prevent colds," John said). Heavy rain droplets beat the tall windows in waves as the wind screamed and howled, but the Great Hall was bright and cheerful, full of student chatter, delicious smells, luminous candles and warm fires. Harry stole a brief look at the Hufflepuff table. Hannah and Ernie were talking to Julia, who looked wane, stressed and terribly uncertain.

Harry timed his exit to be around the time Julia started packing her many books.

"I have to do something quick. I'll see you two at the Common Room."

Harry left the Great Hall, climbed half-way up to the first floor and partially hid himself behind a tall finial at the bend. He looked down and saw Julia dragging her feet across the entrance hall. She hesitated at the mouth of the wide staircase, oscillating between the stone steps leading down and the marble stairs leading up. Then, gripping the railing she marched up, one step at a time.

Julia was so focused on climbing, she didn't notice Harry and walked right pass him.

"Hello."

Julia started and faced left. Harry let out a single, amused chuckle at her startled face.

"Let's go."

Harry led the way to the third floor. He didn't look back to see if Julia was following, but the soft patter of footsteps right behind him told Harry she was. Harry took a brief sideway glance at the corridor that once housed Fluffy and wondered where the three headed hellhound was taken to (the Forbidden Forest, perhaps?). He didn't pause, though, but turned straight into the Charms corridor and entered the trophy room. It was empty except for the crystal display cases that kept all the old awards, trophies, statues, cups, plates, shields, and medals.

Harry politely studied the Award for Special Services to the School given to one T.M. Riddle as he readied his phone and waited for Julia to appear.

Julia warily poked her head into the trophy room, like a spooked clownfish investigating the waters outside the confines of its anemone. Then her head withdrew and her entire person entered, one tentative foot first, the shoulder on the same side next, and the rest of her body quietly slipping in afterwards. She stood awkwardly by the door, her hands loosely knitted around her stomach as she watched Harry uncertainly. Harry held up his phone. Julia switched from looking at the phone, to Harry, then back again. Harry repeated the offering gesture. A few beats later, Julia unknitted her hands, slowly reached out for the phone and dialled a number.

The universal dialling tone rang inside the silent trophy room three times. Then there was the tall-tail click signalling an open line.

"This is Detective Inspector Lestrade," said a familiar growly voice.

Julia's voice hitched. " *Daddy?* "

"Julia?" said Mr. Lestrade in astonishment. "Sweetheart, is that you?"

That was as far as that conversation went. Julia's eyes welled over and she burst into wailing sobs. Every time she tried to stay something, nothing would come out and she would dissolve right back into tears. Mr. Lestrade kept asking in increasingly distressed tones, "Julia, what's wrong?" and "Sunshine, are you all right?"

It took a while for Julia to calm down. At length she sniffled, took several gulping breaths and wiped the tears away from her eyes with the heel of her palm.

"Miss you," she whispered, two errant tears escaping and trickling down her nose.

"Miss you too," said Mr. Lestrade in choked voice. "Love ya. You know that, yeah?"

"Uhn," Julia replied, after swallowing back sob.

Julia and Mr. Lestrade didn't talk afterwards. Julia ended the call with a soft, barely discernible 'bye', thrust the phone back into Harry's hands and ran out of the trophy room. Harry followed after her.

Harry found Julia inside the armour gallery, crouching behind an ugly suit of armour perhaps made for a troll. She had her face buried into her knees, but her shoulders weren't shaking. Uncertain of his role in this situation, Harry felt around the insides of his robe pockets. There he found the Chocolate Frogs he kept for snacking. He plunked down next to Julia and prodded a packet against her leg.

"Here, have one."

Julia looked up a fraction. She blinked miserably at the Chocolate Frog before looking away, mumbling: "No."

"Go on, take it," Harry urged. "It'll make you feel better."

Julia took the packet. She nibbled on a hind-leg listlessly after

unwrapping it. There was a moment of surprise when she tasted the chocolate. Then she stuffed the rest of the Chocolate Frog into her mouth and chewed.

"… I thought eating chocolate making you feel better was a myth," said Julia after swallowing.

"It could be," Harry agreed.

They sat in a companionable silence.

"You can borrow my phone again, if you like," said Harry. "Just let me know."

"I can?" Julia stammered. "I mean, is it okay? I heard you used to, but not anymore."

"I only lend it to the people I know," said Harry. "Your Dad and my Mum are friends, so you're okay."

Julia let out a silent *oh*, and then nodded. "Thank you."

There was another bout of silence. Harry pretended to look around while Julia fiddled the hem of her robe, looking like she desperately wanted to say something.

"Can I ask you a question?" Julia finally erupted.

"Sure, what about?" said Harry.

" *Spells*," said Julia. "How do you do them? I can't seem to get them to work."

"Er, I don't think I'm the right person to ask that question," said Harry awkwardly. "I do okay, but it's really Hermione who-"

"'Hermione Granger is top of everything in *grades*, but when it comes to casting *spells*, Harry Potter is the best.' That's what everyone told me," said Julia.

Harry wanted to know who 'they' were, so he could speak some serious words against exaggeration.

"There has to be something I'm missing," Julia went on. "I mean, I can't even get my wand to like me, and…"

Harry frowned. "What do you mean you can't get your wand to like you?"

"Exactly what I mean," said Julia, sounding deeply upset as she pulled out an old, but well-polished wand. "My wand *hates* me. I can *tell* ."

Harry wanted to point out wands didn't have *minds* to have feelings with, but he could hardly say so when he was no more a wand expert than the average Muggle-born second year, baring, of course, Hermione. Figuring he should at least try a couple of spells to see what the fuss was about, Harry took hold of Julia's wand.

He was immediately stabbed with the strong feeling of *NO* . If the wand had eyes, it would have given Harry a deadly glare for having ideas above his station. Shaken, Harry quickly let go of the wand.

"Your wand doesn't like me either."

" *Right* ?" Julia exclaimed. "I'm not imagining things, right?"

"No," Harry confirmed.

Harry chewed on his lower lip as he recalled everything he knew about wands. He didn't know much. " *It's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course*," said Mr. Ollivander, when Harry entered his shop to buy his own wand. Also: " *You won't quite achieve the same results from another person's wand* ." Harry was pretty sure Julia was using her mother's old wand (" *I'll definitely look for Cecilia's old wand* ."). The first day he met Ron, he told Harry he never got anything new, having five brothers; he got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand, and Percy's old rat. If he remembered correctly, Neville was using his father's old wand. He and Hermione had new wands, and never had the kind of trouble Ron and Neville regularly had in class: lacklustre response, odd behaviour, or just plain not working. *But.* Seamus and Dean had new wands and they were doing about as well as Ron. Yet Harry couldn't shake the feeling there was a connection here somewhere.

"I never had to make my wand like me," said Harry slowly. "And I don't think your wand is acting like this because you didn't practice or something like that. Ernie told me you're good at Potions, and that takes a lot of work."

"But Potions isn't like doing *spells*," Julia protested. "I'm sure even Muggles can do it."

"No, they can't. I *know* so. Sherlock tried and even the simplest potion didn't work. You *need* to have magic to make potions."

Julia frowned. "Even so, as long as you follow the directions…"

"Not the way Snape puts it," said Harry darkly. "Like last year when we were making the Forgetfulness Potion, he looked over my shoulder and said: ' *are you trying to mangle those roots, Potter, or are you trying to saw your fingers off?* 'and I was cutting the roots just like the directions told me."

"Did you hone your knife first?" asked Julia.

"Hone my knife?" Harry repeated blankly.

"Every time you use a soft-metal blade, the edge deforms a bit," Julia explained, making a wiggly motion with her hand. "If you don't hone your knife before or after you use it, the edge doesn't stay straight, so you end up *tearing* the ingredients, not slicing it like you should be."

"Oh," said Harry. "Well, then he made a nasty comment when I was cutting up the blatherous string beans-"

"Was it for the juice or for the beans?"

"The juice."

"It's better to crush beans with the flat of the blade if you're after the juice. The level plane and larger surface area allow you to squeeze out more juices from the fibres."

Harry stared at her a bit.

"Why would Snape think I'm an idiot when I'm stirring the potion like I'm supposed to?"

"Did you stir in the right direction? The recipe wouldn't specify that unless it was important…"

Harry listened with increasing astonishment as Julia gave plausible reasons for every snide remark he received from Snape. He was pretty sure his textbooks didn't explain the difference between *simmering* and *boiling*, but apparently the temperature difference between the two states were significant. Nor did the textbook tell him that when you incorporate 'dry' ingredients to a foamy solution, you shouldn't *mix* them, but *fold* them in because mixing would collapse the delicate foam structure. Harry didn't know if Snape ever covered this stuff in class; he had better things to do in Potions than listen to Snape. But if Snape did cover it, only someone like Hermione would've picked it up. And if Snape *didn't* cover it, that meant only one thing.

"You're really good at this," said Harry.

Julia flushed red. "Oh, c'mon…"

"No, really," said Harry. "You have the knack."

Julia glowed, thus confirming Harry's theory she was a lot like Hermione. Hermione thrived in compliments and a job well done, and he was pretty sure Hermione would be hysterical if she didn't do well in school no matter how much study time she poured into it. At least Julia didn't drive everyone nuts while trying to solve her problems.

Julia was in a much brighter mood when they said good bye, despite the fact Harry couldn't answer her question about spells.

"Thank you, Harry. I feel a lot better now," said Julia.

"No problem," said Harry. "Take care."

Harry watched her go down the marble steps. He started heading towards the library when the last visage of her ponytail vanished. Harry typed his latest question into his phone as he walked through

the deserted stairways and halls, nursing a theory.

Harry didn't, therefore, have a reason to register any sound other than that of his footsteps. Yet he heard something quite unexpected.

It was a voice, a voice to chill the bone marrow, a voice of breath-taking, ice-cold venom.

" *Come… come to me… Let me rip you… tear you… kill you…* "

Harry gave a huge jump and searched the halls frantically.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

No one answered. Harry strained his ears to hear the voice again, but there was no sound except the patter of rain.

Harry surveyed the empty hall one more time. Then he hurriedly resumed his trek to the library.

"Wands?" said Hermione keenly when Harry rejoined her and Ron in the common room carrying *A Brief History in Wandlore, the Anatomy of a Wand*, and *Wands-Do We Really Need Them?* "You went to look up on wands?"

"It occurred to me I don't know anything about wands when we need them for most magic," said Harry, tipping the books on the table. "There weren't a lot of books about wands, though, and most had already been checked out."

Hermione looked fascinated as she browsed through the contents. Ron, who was half-way through his Potions essay and grumpy, didn't deign to look up. Harry surreptitiously passed his outline to him and Ron mouthed a fervent ' *thanks* !' before he resumed scribbling.

"They've all been checked out by Ms. Shin recently," said Hermione, as she checked the back flyleaf of *A Brief History in Wandlore* where all the names who borrowed the book were listed. "She returned this about a week ago."

"I wonder why she wanted to read them," said Harry.

"Maybe it just caught her eye? She's always reading something when I go for my lessons."

Rain was still lashing the windows, which were now inky black, but inside all looked bright and cheerful. The firelight glowed over the countless squashy armchairs where people sat reading, talking, doing homework or, in the case of Fred and George, trying to find out what happened if you fed a Filibuster firework to a salamander. Fred had "rescued" the brilliant orange, fire-dwelling lizard from Care of Magical Creatures class and it was now smouldering gently on a table surrounded by a knot of curious people.

Harry was at the point of telling Ron and Hermione about the voice he heard in the halls when the salamander suddenly whizzed into the air, emitting large sparks and bangs as it whirled wildly around the room. The sight of Percy bellowing himself hoarse at Fred and George, the spectacular display of tangerine stars showering from the salamander's mouth, and its escape into the fire, with accompanying explosion, made Harry rethink the idea of telling his friends he heard a disembodied voice in the empty corridors. It was probably just Peeves. The poltergeist was known to sometimes turn himself invisible, sneak up to a person and grab their nose screaming: *GOT YOUR CONK!* So he just added it to his list of questions:

Dobby house-elf's warning: don't go to hogwarts it's dangerous. why?

wands, wth are they?

I'm hearing voices! (*Just Peeves?)*

Miss j reading books about wands - why?

"Done!" Ron said, stabbing his quill on his parchment to mark the final full stop. "Okay, let's swap."

Harry took Hermione's, Hermione took Ron's and Ron took Harry's potions essay. They've been doing this for a while now. Hermione

wouldn't let them copy, so Harry and Ron used to ask her to read through her essays and got all the right answers that way. But then Hermione cotton in on it, so she refused to do that as well. This was the compromise they reached: they would check each other's homework and make corrections as needed (and whoever got Hermione would share her corrections).

Harry read through Hermione's four feet long composition (actual requirement: two feet and a half).

"You have to fold the crushed spiders into the foaming solution, not mix it."

" *What?* !" Hermione screeched. She snatched back her essay and checked the paragraph against the textbook. Then she sighed. "Don't be silly, Harry, the book clearly says: *mix in the crushed spiders while maintaining foam.* "

"Okay," said Harry, shrugging. "Just thought folding would let you maintain the foam better."

Hermione snorted. Still, Harry corrected his own essay to say 'fold' rather than 'mix'.

Final Notes : Ron's sentiment towards Carl Czerny was mine when I was learning piano as a child. His name was synonymous to torture… him and Hanon. Oh, my childhood. There seems to be a lot of debate on the usefulness of Hanon and Czerny. I think some people can handle repetitive exercises better while others require a more intuitive approach and acquire technique along the way.

A SJ-light chapter this time. Perhaps in the next one we'll see them-in Hogwarts :D

Hidden History on a Wall

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Three: Hidden History on a Wall

It was Tuesday evening in Muggle London. The Lestrades' flat was full cheerful talking and devoid of Detective Inspector Lestrade, who stayed as far away from home as possible whenever his wife hosted Small Group. The guests were enjoying dark chocolate covered pomegranate morsels. Ellen Lestrade was nursing baby Elise, wincing here and there when Elise didn't suckle properly.

"Soooo- Greg and Julia have been calling each other three times a week," said Ellen brightly. "It's sooo sweet, and Harry is so good about it. I *love* him."

"That's good to know," said Jacqueline wearily. "He's been a little tinker otherwise."

John groaned. "What is he doing now that he isn't telling me?"

"Skiving," Jacqueline reported. "He won't go to My-Colleague-Who-Shall-Remain-Anonymous' classes, and threatening detention doesn't work."

John's eyebrows rose. "Really. Well I know why. The last time I talked to him, Harry was ranting Back-Pain was making him

participate in all of his 'travels' re-enactments, and he's usually cast as the village idiot. That's when Haemorrhoids isn't reading large passages out of his own books. I'm tempted to cheer him."

"Please don't. You're our most solid line of defence," pleaded Jacqueline. Then she sighed. "I'm starting to really understand what they mean by the power struggle against students: I *want* Harry to go to class and show his teachers respect, but forcing him isn't going to change his heart and that's the important thing."

" *Ye-ah*," said Becky, making a sharp chopping gesture. "You know what, that's exactly it: I keep trying to change my students' behaviour, but their attitude? Even if they do what you tell them to, you can *tell* that they don't care-" a point for emphasis, "they want to dip out-" another one, "and they're *not* listening," final point.

"But how do you address this?" said Jacqueline. "I can't just let it go. There are deeper character issues at stake. J, how would *you* punish him?"

"I usually tell him how disappointed I am," said John. "I expected this, this, this from you, but you did this, this, this instead. You're better than that, etc. I don't have to yell-it's more effective when I'm calm and serious."

"And he just listens?" said Becky in disbelief.

"Yeah," said John. "Harry might bend a few rules and rebel here and there, but he never disobeyed me outright."

"Ohmygosh he's *amazing*," said Becky in wonderment.

"That's because he *cares* about what you think," Joanna pointed out. "If he didn't care, he wouldn't listen."

Jacqueline nibbled on the side of her left forefinger pensively.

"I don't think Harry and I have the kind of relationship where he'd take my disappointment seriously," she said. "The Headmaster does, but this isn't you-need-to-go-to-the-headmaster's-office level trouble-yet. There's Harry's Head of House, of course, but I'm afraid she's going to just emphasize the rule breaking, and not the heart."

"Wait, I'm confused," said Amy. "Are you saying Harry goes to all of his classes except the one Back-Pain teaches?"

"Uh-huh."

"And he's doing fine at his other classes?"

"Yes."

"Why would he do that?" Amy asked. "I mean, everyone skips class at one point, but why just skip that one?"

"What if-he's protesting?" said Ellen as she burped Elise. "Like, 'I'm not wasting my life with your poo'."

"That's definitely his attitude towards to Anonymous, but he doesn't do that to S, and arguably S gives him more poo," said Jacqueline.

"It's not arguable, he *is*," John growled.

"I think it depends on his definition of poo," said Ellen thoughtfully, "like, he can at least endure S since he's, like, actually teaching stuff, but Back-Pain doesn't really *teach* you anything so why bother?"

"So we're back to square-one," said Amy, grinning slightly, "How do you convince Harry to go to class even if the class itself is useless."

There was a thoughtful pause.

"J," said Jacqueline. "What are the character traits you emphasize on Harry?"

"What do you mean by character traits?" asked John.

"Treat others as you want them to treat you; work hard; listen well. You know that sort of thing."

"Don't give anything or anyone the honour of ruining your life. Be kind and courageous. Embrace hard work. Think. Otherwise: Carpe Diem."

"I think Harry's using clause 'don't give anyone the honour of ruining your life' to rationalize his skiving," said Jacqueline, "which is interesting because he's probably using the same clause to grit his teeth and go to S's classes. Well. I think I know what to do now."

"What are you going do?"

Jacqueline told them. John whistled.

"And to think you were worried about going too soft on the kids," said John.

As one of Harry Potter's best friends and the male of the two, Ron Weasley could easily lay claim to understanding Harry the best in Hogwarts. It wasn't hard, usually, as Harry was a pretty straightforward bloke: he liked helping people, adored his mother shamelessly, liked having fun, could be mind-bogglingly stubborn at times, and had extremely low tolerance for pointless activities.

That didn't mean there weren't times Ron wondered what was going inside his funny little head.

He completely understood when Harry refused to show up for Defense Against the Dark Arts after Lockhart forced him to play the role of a simple villager from Transylvania, a yeti with a head cold, and a vampire who was unable to eat anything but lettuce after Lockhart was done with it for three lessons straight. It was bad enough you had to sit through a class that taught you nothing, but not having the option of doing something *else* and always singled out for the most humiliating role-plays was just too much to ask to anyone. Nevertheless, Professor McGonagall put Harry in detention. Harry returned around dinner the next day smelling strongly of polish after spending the afternoon polishing the silver in the trophy room without magic.

Ron started to feel baffled when Harry *still* refused to show up to class after this. He marvelled at Harry's nerve when Professor McGonagall called him up to her desk after Transfigurations, her mouth a horizontal gash on her face, and Harry just looked

stubbornly back. Hermione's shrill and dire warnings that lasted the entire day didn't move him and Professor McGonagall's berating and removal of house points didn't move him either.

Then sickly little Miss Jackie called Harry aside when he and Ron showed up for music lessons.

"I'll be arranging your detentions, Harry," said Miss Jackie. "You know why you're having them."

Harry shrugged. Miss Jackie leaned forward with her hands clasped under her chin. She looked solemn and grave.

"Please tell me why you're doing this," she asked.

Harry kept his glance sideways and didn't say anything. Ron switched from nervously watching Harry to Miss Jackie, wondering how the stalemate would end.

"J told me," Miss Jackie said quietly, and Harry twitched at the mention of his Mum, "that she wants you to be kind and courageous. Now I know being kind consistently is quite difficult, especially when you don't see the point of it, but I thought for the sake of J if nothing else you'd treat Professor Lockhart differently."

"Like how?" Harry asked mutinously.

Ron never thought Miss Jackie was capable of showing such terrifying levels of cold disappointment as she did at that moment, even for a second.

"For you to have the courage to confront Professor Lockhart in the open with well thought-out objections, and not disregard him as subhuman trash," she pronounced.

Harry caved like wet paper. He looked down, ashen, like he'd received several body-blows to his stomach.

"Harry, I want you to understand that this is not okay," said Miss Jackie, her terrifying disappointment gone like an illusion and now just looking stern. "I won't presume to know why you're refusing to go to your Defence classes. But the flagrant disregard and attitude

of rebellion in which you're doing it - frankly, you look petty and immature. I *know* J taught you better than this, and I know you can do better . So I refuse to allow you to continue."

"… I'm sorry," Harry mumbled. "I'll stop. I-"

"I'm not the person you should be apologizing to," Miss Jackie interrupted.

Harry, if possible, looked even more sickened. After studying him for a moment, Miss Jackie leaned back and heaved a little sigh.

"After your lesson, you and I are going to see Professor Lockhart," Miss Jackie declared. "You will apologize. Then I am doing to tell you what you're going to do for the next three weeks."

"Three *weeks!* ?"

"Three weeks of detention with me for the three weeks of class you skipped," said Miss Jackie flatly. "It's either that or helping Professor Lockhart answer his fan mail."

Harry blanched. "I'll take the three weeks."

"Good. Now move along, Ron. You're having the other me today."

Ron spent the next hour practicing Mozart under the Other Miss Jackie's scrutiny, distracted and more than a little fearful of the frail woman he honestly thought was an easily-embarrassed doormat.

Harry returned to the Gryffindor tower a few minutes after Ron got there looking oddly at peace. Harry told Ron and Hermione that Miss Jackie had cut-off Lockhart right after he apologised, putting on her Iron Lady face and saying: "I'm rather curious as to why you're singling out Harry to play the role of the hapless villager or the equally hapless opponent in your re-enactments when you have so many other students and roles available." Lockhart was incapable of answering that question and the ones that followed. Thus Harry was able to leave with his dignity intact and the promise Lockhart will stop his 'preferential treatment'.

"So what are you doing for detention?" Hermione asked, sounding

friendly now that Harry had repented.

Harry made a funny half-smile, "I'm helping Miss Jackie build an electric generator."

" *What!* ?" both Ron and Hermione exclaimed.

"I'm serious," said Harry, looking dazed. "She has all the blueprints drawn up and materials ready, and Dumbledore gave her the go ahead. I'm helping her set up the turbine starting tomorrow."

Hermione opened and closed her mouth. "But Miss Jackie's a pure-blood witch and a music teacher. How does she know anything about *electricity* ?"

"Google?" said Harry, before adding, "Miss Jackie only moonlights as a music teacher. Her real job is a systems engineer. I reckon she knows as much about electronics as she does music."

Harry spent every evening for the next three weeks having 'detention dates' with Miss Jackie. Creating an electric generator from scratch turned out to be a dreadfully complicated business. For one thing, Miss Jackie couldn't do any magic except her cool cloning spell. This meant Harry had to do all the necessary charms and transfigurations. Sometimes this required him to spend long hours in the library researching spells or asking Flitwick or McGonagall for advice. Also, Harry had to learn 'Algebra', 'Geometry' and 'Physics' in order to correctly calculate the amount of electricity the turbine was generating (Ron stopped trying to understand after the word Algebra). Every spare moment Harry was working, carting books or assisting Miss Jackie, which made it very clear to the other Gryffindors he was being thoroughly punished.

Hermione was the only other person besides Harry who didn't think so.

"He's learning loads," said Hermione jealously one evening while Harry was out assisting Miss Jackie. " *Serious* loads. No one tried to make an electric generator in Hogwarts before. If it works, it might even make history!"

Ron recalled the pearly-white turbine, made to look like a windmill for aesthetic purposes, the coils and long wires. For an historic object, it sure looked ugly. Hermione's response to the project was predictable and expected, because she was weird like that, but he couldn't even begin to understand Harry's willingness to do all the work when he wasn't weird like Hermione. Okay, so perhaps avoiding Lockhart was reason enough for Harry, but Ron still couldn't wrap his brain around it. Wasn't it better to suffer only three hours instead of three whole weeks?

"Maybe you should start skipping Defence Against the Dark Arts, too, so you can join Harry in detention," Ron said.

"But it's important!" said Hermione, scandalized.

"How? I don't remember learning anything except not setting pixies loose."

"Well, there's the Homorphus charm," said Hermione, floundering. "I don't think I read about that elsewhere and… and the babbling curse and…"

Ron grinned as Hermione tripped all over herself trying to justify Lockhart. It was kind of cute.

"C'mon, just admit it," said Ron. "You think Harry is learning more useful and fascinating stuff than whatever it is we're learning from Lockhart."

Hermione screwed up her face, like admitting the truth was physically painful. Ron laughed.

"If you want to get involved, you could just *ask*," he said. "I'm sure Miss Jackie won't mind."

That was exactly what they did the following afternoon after lunch. They joined Harry at the music room, which was where the magic-powered electric generator was being built, and found Julia Lestrade, Hagrid and, for reasons unknown, Argus Filch and Mrs. Norris there besides Miss Jackie, who was more than happy to let them join.

"Come on in," said Miss Jackie cheerfully. Ron noticed she looked paler than usual despite the borrowed colour from the peach jacket she wore. "Please sit down and I'll explain the progress we've made so far."

They sat. Miss Jackie gestured the structure that looked like a windmill tipped to the side. The blades were turning energetically despite the lack of wind, and a plastic Muggle device connected to the wires hanging at the end of the pole appeared to be measuring something. Its tiny gray screen showed the characters: 400RPM; 1kW.

"We're basically using the centrifugal force of the windmill to, uh, generate electricity," said Miss Jackie, faltering a bit when she noticed Hagrid and Ron's utter confusion. "More simply put, magic turns the windmill, windmill turns the magnet-" she pointed the hub, "-magnet disrupts the electrons inside the coils and sends it down the wires. That's how we're generating electricity."

"You've used the cartwheeling charm to turn the windmill. That's clever," said Hermione, nodding in approval. "I suppose you put it on as a fixture?"

"Yup," said Miss Jackie, "Harry worked it all out in a day. Then he added a permanent chilling charm inside the hub to dissipate the heat created by friction. Julia here whipped up a lubricant potion to grease up the shaft. Mr. Hagrid transported all the required materials and helped me solder the joints. He even offered to raise the structure."

"Don' mention it," said Hagrid gruffly, clutching a pink umbrella Harry was pointedly *not* looking at. Miss Jackie smiled as Hagrid picked up the windmill like it weighted nothing and made it stand on its four legs.

"Thank you so much," said Miss Jackie. "I really didn't want to bother you again after doing so much already, but when I tried the levitation charm, it um…" She raised a trembling fist to imitate an object feebly rising to the air before dropping to ground like a rock. "… I couldn't do it."

"Ah, well," said Hagrid. "I don' have great shakes in magic meself, and sometimes tis better to do it by hand."

"I know. Still, I'd love to be able to do it," said Miss Jackie wistfully.

Miss Jackie then drew a diagram of an atom to explain what an electron was and why they were critical to generating electricity for those who had no Muggle background (electricity was simply the *flow* of electrons-who knew?). Then Miss Jackie showed them all the charge controller she'd built. Ron felt his head blank-out as Miss Jackie explained the purpose of each individual component. He understood the purpose of the controller, though: Since automation charms like the cartwheeling spell had the tendency to get tired or too excited depending on the mood, the controller was there to monitor the voltage- a measurement of electricity- of the batteries in the system, and send the power from the turbine into the batteries to recharge them, or dump the power into a secondary load if the batteries were fully charged, thus prevent over-charging and destroying the batteries.

"It's like making sure your water supply tanks aren't bursting at the seams," Miss Jackie remarked. "If tank A is full, move outlet to tank B; if tank A still has some space left over, keep outlet in tank A."

Once she finished explaining the progress and provided enough background info, Miss Jackie went over today's agenda: making a barrier that would stop the stray magic in the air from destroying the electronic equipment. It was the trickiest part of the building process, but it did address something everyone in Hogwarts wondered at least once.

"I wondered why Harry's phone works when by rights it shouldn't," said Miss Jackie as she fumbled around some sheets of rice paper variously smeared or drenched in dark-red ink. "But before I could answer that question, I had to ask why magic is often accompanied by light and sparks. This seemed to imply magic effects the electro-magnetic spectrum in some way. If this is the case, it's no wonder radio and complex electronic devices like TV and laptops don't work in Hogwarts: the magic-charged atmosphere is creating EM pulses everywhere, so any device running complex circuitry will short itself out. The same goes for power grids. But that made answering the

question of why Harry's phone works even trickier: not only does the device have to work, but the signal has to transmit too, but those are precisely the things that wouldn't work because of the stray magic interference."

Ron's brain felt like a wrung sponge from just absorbing that. Hermione was frowning like she didn't quite understand, and Harry's eyebrows were set an obtuse angle. Julia alone looked alert.

"So you're saying electronics need nice even waves running on narrow channels to work, but stray magic keeps crashing over those channels like a hurricane," she said, using her left arm to simulate an even stream and her right hand to mime crashing waves.

"I couldn't put it better," said Miss Jackie. "Also, the intuitive way in which Harry's phone works implies magic is the reason why the phone is working, but magic by its nature would do the exact opposite. What then is the key?"

Everyone just stared blankly. It was very novel experience, seeing Hermione look so clueless.

"If magic is not directly interfering for or against the phone," Miss Jackie continued, "could it be that magic is somehow *stepping aside* to create a magic-free space? Magic is the only power in the world that has a form of sentience. If there is a way to make magic recognise ' *thus far, and no further*,' then of course phones would work."

"So you think Harry's phone has a natural magic-free barrier?" said Hermione sceptically. "But the only difference between Harry's phone and everyone else's is that John owned it for at least a month, and John isn't a witch." She brightened a bit, "unless she's a witch raised as a Muggle like you? I've read there are rare cases of witches or wizards who manifest magic very late in life-"

"No," said Miss Jackie. "Dumbledore checked the admission books dating back to J's birth, and her name isn't on it. My father checked J on two occasions and detected not a smidgeon of magic ability. She's 100% Muggle."

"Oh," said Hermione, crestfallen. Then she brightened up again, "How does your father detect magic ability?" she was always very eager to learn more about Grandmaster Shin, whom Harry mentioned three weeks back.

"I'm glad you asked that," said Miss Jackie. "Let me ask you lot a question first: If you connect two water cans of equal capacity at the same height, one having more water than the other, what would happen?"

Hermione shot her hand up. Ron, Harry and Julia stared at her, bemused.

"Water flows from the can that has more water to the can that has less, until both cans have equal amounts of water," she answered promptly.

"Correct. Five points to Gryffindor," said Miss Jackie, grinning. "The water can example is a demonstration of the equilibrium principle. It happens to energy just like it happens to water. Now, magic is a form of energy. What would happen if your magic came in contact with a container that has less magic than you?"

Hermione's eyes went wide. "It would flow into the container that has less magic!"

"Exactly. And that is the essence of wands," said Miss Jackie. "On a purely energy level, witches and wizards have a hard time controlling magic without a wand because they simply have too many outlets. Holding a wand gives them a focal point. Of course, reality is not that simple. As I mentioned before, magic is not *merely* energy. It has sentience. So, for magic to flow from one source to another, the two sources have to cooperate. A wand, which has less magic than a human being, still has the ability to refuse and rebel thanks to its powerful magical core. A person who has a lot of power could possibility overrule a wand's intentions, but the wand would only do so under protest."

"So my wand doesn't work *because* it hates me," said Julia, scowling at her wand like she couldn't believe it could be so petty.

"I wouldn't say hate," said Miss Jackie gently. "If the wand reflects its original owner… well, Cecilia was very independent and had a hard time warming up to people, but very loyal to the selected few."

Julia continued to scowl at her wand, muttering one would think the stupid thing would warm up to its previous owner's daughter at least. Ron on his part grumbled over Charlie's old wand he was forced to use, thinking about all the difficulties he could've avoided if only he had his own wand. Sometimes it really sucked to be youngest son.

"Going back to my father, he detects magic ability with a simple paper talisman," said Miss Jackie, lifting up a plastic bag that had a square sheet of rice paper that had a black lines running parallel to all the edges inside. "The lines light up when someone who has even a minuscule amount of magic ability touches it. There's enough magic stored in this thing that only the smidgen automatically transferred by contact is enough to fire off the spell. My father increases the required transfer amount to gauge how much raw power a child has."

Miss Jackie let them experiment. When Harry, Ron, Hermione and Julia touched the paper, the black lines burned gold. When Hagrid touched it, the lines lit up, but the light was dimmer. For Filch the lines didn't light up at all.

"How come Hogwarts doesn't use this?" asked Hermione hastily when Filch turned purple.

"Magic isn't something you can measure in discrete quantities," said Miss Jackie. "That makes standardized measurement virtually impossible. Hogwarts uses a similar 'magic enough' test for admissions, but my father's test goes further than that-you could, possibly, determine person A is more powerful than person B because A lit up four talismans and B only lit up two. But any test trying to measure a person's aptitude has the danger of trying to measure too much. You might end up like a person who's trying figure out which child has more athletic ability based on the size of their muscles or how quickly they can recover their breath; the measurement will tell you *something* about their athletic ability, but not as well as actually training the child."

"So it's not a reliable test," said Hermione.

"Heavens no," said Miss Jackie. "But don't tell my father that. He never accepted this point of subtly."

"So how does all this relate to creating a magic-free zone?" asked Harry, "The way you put it, it sounds like magic will always rush in to fill the gaps."

"The same way you wrap rubber around wires and connect circuits to the ground to prevent electricity from wreaking havoc," Miss Jackie replied. "You insulate it or ground it. We need something that doesn't possess magic and won't attract it either."

Harry frowned. "Is there such a thing?"

"If by definition a Muggle or a Squib is someone who neither has the ability to generate or use magic," said Miss Jackie, "Could it be their very *person* is a magical insulator or a grounder?"

All six jaws dropped.

"I wondered why Hogwarts always had an honourable resident Squib," said Miss Jackie, giving Filch a small bow. "The practice dates back to the four founders, but no explanation was given in the history books. But if you think about the physical properties of magic, you could postulate magic will act more erratically in magic-rich environs without a Squib or a Muggle to ground it down. In other words, you may owe it to Mr. Filch for your ability to harness your magic so quickly and well here in Hogwarts."

The four students plus Hagrid stared at Filch in horror. Filch gaped opened-mouthed at Miss Jackie, looking rather comical with his eyes popping out, until he whirled around to puff out his chest and pound a fist on it.

"HEARD THAT?" he howled, his eyes bulging alarmingly and spit flying everywhere. "You brats only get to do any magic at all here because of *me!* ME!"

"Yes, Mr. Filch. I can't tell you how grateful I am that you're here," said Miss Jackie sincerely, much to Ron's palpable shock. "Mr. Filch

kindly donated a bit of his blood so I could create an anti-magic barrier-which just a glorified sheet of paper painted in ink mixed with a bit of his blood. And yes," Miss Jackie said at Ron and Hermione's shocked faces. "I used blood because human blood is a powerful magical substance-or anti-magical substance in this case."

"But using human blood is Dark Magic!" Ron protested.

Miss Jackie blinked at him.

"That would mean around eighty percent of Oriental Magic still being practiced today is Dark Magic," she said. "Many magic practitioners in Asiatic countries don't use wands, but mix their own blood in ink to create what is popularly known as *fuda* or paper talismans as they're sometimes called. Is that what you're saying?"

"No," said Ron quickly, because obviously that was what he was supposed to say.

Miss Jackie gave him a crooked smile.

"I should also mention, until the Roman Republic triggered the first magical renaissance, magical beasts weren't creatures you could approach or capture without seriously endangering your life. That's why dragon slaying and unicorn capturing was such a big deal. It wasn't until 200 *A.D.* did wands with magical creature cores gain predominance in Europe. Until that point, the only substance powerful enough to allow a witch or a wizard to channel their magic that was also readily available was *blood* . So for the longest time blood was the only feasible way for witches and wizards to properly use their magic. Of course, there were people who thought the more blood you used, the more powerful the wand would be."

Ron swallowed as the implications fell into place. Harry, Hermione and Julia looked no less disturbed.

"Muggles don't fear us without reason," said Miss Jackie quietly. "We have several *thousands* of years of human blood sacrifice history to answer for. Muggles are still digging up mass graves of children sacrificed in order to create blood-based wands in Carthage, and you'll find archaeological remains of similar sites all

around the world. We know better *now* -it's not about the amount of blood used, but the power of the blood's owner-but it's understandable a lot of witches and wizards think blood magic equals Dark Magic. I find it intriguing History of Magic doesn't even mention this, but cover Muggle persecution of witches and wizards at great length."

Miss Jackie glided over to her desk, which was hidden almost entirely under stacks of books and music scores.

"The development of magic as civilizations became more, well, *enlightened* is interesting too," said Miss Jackie, tracing a finger down a book spine. "A popular proverb in magical communities of early first and second century A.D. is 'befriend thy magic but not thine wand' or another variant: 'thy magic thine friend forever, the medium never ever.' Blood wands were still the dominant way at that point in history. The proverb vanishes in Europe when the magical-creature core wands became more readily available, but it is still taught in many Oriental Countries. I grew up learning it, too. But I digress."

She turned to face them.

"I'm not saying it's okay to use human blood for benign intentions, because I honestly don't know and frankly I'm biased," said Miss Jackie. "What I'm trying to say is this: *don't jump to conclusions* .

"That said," said Miss Jackie, clapping her hands and holding them together. "Let's test my little theory on the anti-magic properties of non-magical blood. I could be just spewing hot air, and what I'm trying to test doesn't come even close to what happens to the things Harry's mother holds onto."

They gathered around the charge controllers (Miss Jackie made several). They were tied together by a long ball-chain John had owned. Miss Jackie slapped a rice paper sheet covered in blood-ink on one of them, don thick gloves, connected the wires on the windmill to the charge controller and moved the controller outside the ball-chain.

The controller promptly spewed massive sparks and static before

emitting billows of smoke.

"Backup one!" barked Miss Jackie, before Ron could properly feel let down or maliciously amused. She kicked away the smoking controller without a second glance, "Hurry!"

Harry moved the next controller in line. Miss Jackie covered most of its casing with the paper talismans. The second controller lasted longer than the first one, but it, too, started to smoke and spark up.

"Backup two!" Miss Jackie shouted.

Every stare inch of this controller's casing got covered in paper. Ron, Hermione, Julia and Harry jumped in to help. Once they were certain the case was completely covered, they moved the controller out of the protective ring.

Nothing happened-at least, nothing visible happened.

"Voltage and Wattage looks good," said Miss Jackie, checking the needle-gauge on top of the third controller. "Now the true test."

She whipped out Harry's phone and its charger cord. She plugged the charger into the outlet connected to the controller's battery, and the phone to the charger.

The phone started charging.

"YES!" they all shouted. Ron punched the air and Harry pumped both fists. Hermione and Julia were hugging each other, squealing.

"Ohmygosh, that was amazing!" cried Miss Jackie, high-fiving everyone including Filch and Hagrid, who's giant hand knocked her down to the ground. "Thank you so much!"

Miss Jackie's magic-powered electric generator caused quite a stir in Hogwarts. Many students came to see it and were amazed when they found Miss Jackie working on her laptop as calmly as you please. Professor Burbage started bringing her Muggle Studies students for practical demonstrations of Muggle technology.

Professor Flitwick and Professor Dumbledore were deeply interested in learning how the generator worked and paid many visits. The one down side was that Filch became quite insufferable, at one point threatening to resign if he didn't get permission to hang the students up by their ankles as punishment. Hagrid confided to Harry, Ron and Hermione that Dumbledore simply showed Filch the list of Squibs that volunteered to replace him, and that shut the caretaker right up. Still, this didn't stop him from threatening to lock up students in the old dungeons for 'not showing proper respect.'

"Did she *have* to tell Filch he's important to Hogwarts?" grumbled Ron as they headed to the Great Hall for the Hallowe'en feast after receiving such a threat.

"It's only fair," said Hermione. "I thought it was really nice of her, giving him respect."

"Too bad he doesn't know how to take it," Harry said. "How much longer do you think it'll take for her to figure out how to create a proper magic-free zone?"

Miss Jackie wasn't happy that the entire casing needed to be covered with anti-magic talismans in order for the controller to work, thus spent almost every moment of her non-music-teaching time this past week trying to improve it.

"Won't you get in trouble at your real job?" Hermione asked.

"Duplication spell," Miss Jackie reminded her as she drenched some gauzy netting in the blood-ink solution (white this time). "I usually send my clone when my workload is low-or I'm working on something more interesting."

"Nifty that," said Ron, while Hermione looked torn between admiration and disapproval. "If I could duplicate myself, I'd send my clone to do all my classes."

"Sorry, Ron, but you'd get caught very soon," said Miss Jackie. "A clone can mimic you, but it can't do any magic."

Ron's face fell. Hermione, on the other hand, looked interested.

"Why?" she asked.

"The books don't say," Miss Jackie said, "and I only know because some idiot drew inspiration from a Muggle graphic novel about incorrigibly conspicuous ninjas and experimented. *I* think it's because my duplicate isn't truly alive. Only things that have life in it have usable active magic."

Julia's eyes went wide. "And the idiot was…?"

Miss Jackie pointed her thumb at herself. The four of them laughed.

"So what happens when you banish your clones? Do you receive all their memories?" asked Julia.

"No," said Miss Jackie regretfully. "My clone is independent from me. Whatever memories my clone gains are lost when I banish it - unless I *harvest* the memory."

"How do you harvest your clone's memory?" asked Harry.

"Like *this.* "

Miss Jackie pulled out a rice paper sheet full of symbols from her jacket pocket and slapped it on her ever-present clone's forehead. Something that looked like silver vapour started pour out its eyes and seeped into the paper. Once the paper turned completely silver, Miss Jackie lifted the sheet and brought it to her face. The silver liquid on the paper vapourized again and flowed into her eyes and nose.

"There, all done," said Miss Jackie, like she'd done nothing more interesting than blow her nose. Then she frowned. "I'm making you practice *Mozart*, Ron? I thought I'd cover more contemporary stuff… oh, dear."

Ron got to play contemporary stuff in his lesson afterwards. Playing them was about as hard as Mozart, but they were a lot easier on the ears. He would've concentrated better if Miss Jackie (the real one) wasn't puttering around in the background burning old televisions. She was still burning them by droves when they paid a short visit a few hours ago to check her progress. At least she didn't look

discouraged-in fact, she seemed to enjoy the challenge.

"Well, research projects can take a long time, can't they? Especially when you're trying something unprecedented like mixing magic and science," said Hermione reasonably. Then she looked up, "Oh, Julia!"

Hermione ran ahead to catch up to Julia, who was walking ahead and reading at the same time. Julia marked her page, adjusted her glasses and smiled. "Hi, Hermione."

"Ooh, are you done reading that?" said Hermione eagerly, checking the title (*The Anatomy of the Wand*).

"Not even," said Julia ruefully. "It's hard to read something when you have to look up a word in the dictionary for every three sentences."

"Does it help, reading the theory?" asked Hermione, referring to Julia's effort to befriend her Mum's old wand.

"No," Julia groaned. She pulled out her wand from her robe pocket at glared at it. "I should just flush you down Moaning Myrtle's toilet, for all the good you do."

The wand, of course, didn't say anything back. Julia had taken to shouting dire threats at her wand to vent her frustration, which, in Ron's opinion, did nothing to improve relations and only made her look mental. Ron said so once, and Harry dryly retorted his wand percussion therapy had a similar effect. Since then Ron contented himself to joining Harry in sniggering quietly behind her back.

Unfortunately, Julia had very keen ears. "What are you laughing at?"

Ron felt himself turn red in his effort to stop his laughter. Harry had no such problems and sported a perfectly straight face (how?). Julia still glowered at both of them before joining the throng of Hufflepuffs at the Great Hall.

The teachers had really outdone themselves this year for Hallowe'en. Besides the usual live bats, Hagrid's vast pumpkins were carved into lanterns large enough for three men to sit in it and Dumbledore booked a dancing troupe of skeletons for

entertainment. The food was exceptional; even Harry didn't lose his appetite over the pork chops and sausages as he usually did, and happily devoured the grilled marinated beef ribs, Vietnamese spring rolls and jacket potatoes. Oddly enough, it was Ginny who picked at her food, and didn't stay for the puddings even when Harry asked her to try some.

"Dunno what's up with her," said Ron as he forked a large piece of chocolate cake with orange icing. "It's weird seeing her so quiet. Normally she never shuts up."

"Do I make her nervous?" asked Harry, between bites of his favourite treacle tart.

Ron shrugged. George leaned over and winked at Harry.

"Oh, no, Harry. You've been quite the gentleman to her."

"But here's problem," said Fred. "She wants to spend more time with you, but you're always so far away…"

Harry rolled his eyes and let out an aggrieved sigh as Ron, Fred and George chortled.

Ron, Harry and Hermione and Ron's brothers except Percy lingered long over the desserts, laughing and talking, until McGonagall dismissed all the students. It had been a wonderful evening. Ron had only one, small sliver of regret, and it was that there was no Quirrell to burst through the doors announcing there was a troll in the dungeons. He by no means missed Quirrell or the troll, but he did miss that sense of adventure and excitement from last year.

Ron was thinking of his four-poster bed upstairs when he realised the milling body of happy and well-fed students wasn't moving. There appeared to be a blockage from both ends of the corridor, and there was a disconcerting quiet that was spreading through.

"What's going on?" said Harry, trying to peer around the mass of jostling bodies.

They weeded their way through the crowd. Hermione gasped and pointed when they reached the very front.

" *Look* !"

Something was shining on the wall ahead. As they moved closer, squinting through the darkness, they noticed the foot-high words daubed on the wall between two windows, shimmering in the light cast by flaming torches.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED.

ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.

"What's that thing-hanging underneath?" said Ron, hearing the slight quiver in his voice.

As they edged nearer, Harry almost slipped. There was a large puddle of water on the floor. Ron and Hermione grabbed him and hoisted him back to his feet, eyes fixed on the dark shadow beneath it. All three of them realised what it was at once, and leapt back into the crowd.

Mrs. Norris, the caretaker's cat, was hanging by her tail from the torch bracket. She was stiff as a board, her eyes wide and staring.

Ron, Harry and Hermione stood motionless and disbelieving as more students kept pressing forward to see the grisly sight.

Then someone shouted through the quiet.

"Enemies of the Heir, beware! You'll be next, Mudbloods!"

It was Draco Malfoy. He had pushed to the front of the crowd, his cold eyes alive, his usually bloodless face flushed, as he grinned at the sight of the hanging, immobile cat.

For a few days, the school could talk of little else but the attack on Mrs. Norris. Unlike what they'd initially feared, Mrs. Norris had been petrified, not killed. However, Dumbledore was unable to reverse the transfiguration. They would have to wait until the Mandrakes Professor Sprout had procured to fully mature to brew the Mandrake Restorative Draught. Unfortunately, the Mandrakes had only just

started teething, so it would take several more months until this could happen.

Filch kept the incident fresh in their mind's by pacing around the spot she'd been attacked, as though he thought the attacker might come back. Ron had seen him scrubbing the message on the wall with Mrs. Skower's All-Purpose Magical Mess Remover, but to no effect; the words gleamed as brightly as ever on the stone. When he wasn't guarding the scene of crime, he was either skulking red-eyed through the corridors, lunging out at unsuspecting students and trying to put them in detention for "breathing loudly" and "looking happy", or slumped in a chair sobbing into his hands in front of Miss Jackie, who poured cup after steaming cup of tea for him. Ron would've felt sorry except-well, it was *Filch* .

Ginny was deeply disturbed at Mrs. Norris' fate. Ron figured she was upset because of her great love for cats.

"But you didn't get to know Mrs. Norris," Ron said bracingly. "Honestly we're better off without her." Ginny's lips trembled, so he quickly assured her: "Stuff like this doesn't happen often at Hogwarts. They'll catch the maniac who did this and get him out of here in no time. I just hope he'll have time to Petrify Filch before he's expelled. I'm only joking-" He added the latter when Ginny blanched.

The attack had a profound effect on Harry and Hermione. It wasn't unusual for Harry to suddenly go quiet for hours or Hermione to do a lot of reading, but for about a week Ron didn't hear a peep from Harry and Hermione did little else but read. Asking Harry why he wasn't talking was about as effective as asking a statue to speak without magic, so Ron hung around his siblings, assuring a thoroughly alarmed Ginny that Harry was just having a very long silent spell, and waited for him to get out of his latest funk. As for Hermione, she explained herself soon enough: She had been trying read up the legend of the Chamber of Secrets. Unfortunately, everyone else wanted to read it up too, so all the copies of *Hogwarts, A History*, the only book known to have written on the subject, had been checked out by the time she went looking for it. Her own copy was at home to make room for the Lockhart books, and there was a two week long waiting list. Just when it looked as though they'd have to wait for two weeks for answers, Hermione did

something that never happened before: she put up her hand in History of Magic class to ask a question.

Professor Binns glanced up in the middle of a deadly dull lecture on the International Warlock Convention of 1289 when this happened, looking amazed.

"Miss-er-?"

"Granger, Professor. I was wondering if you could tell us anything about the Chamber of Secrets," said Hermione in a clear voice.

Dean Thomas, who had been gazing out of the window with his mouth hanging open, jerked out of trance; Lavender Brown's head came up off her arms and Neville Longbottom's elbow slipped off his desk. Professor Binns blinked.

"My subject is History of Magic," he said in his dry, wheezy voice. "I deal with *facts*, Miss Granger, not myths and legends." He cleared his voice, making a small sound like a chalk snapping, and continued, "In September of that year, a subcommittee of Sardinian sorcerers-"

He stuttered to a halt when he realized Hermione's hand was waving in the air again.

"Miss Grant?"

"Please, sir, don't legends always have a basis in fact?"

Professor Binns was looking at her in such amazement at this point, Ron was sure no student had ever interrupted him before, dead or alive.

"Well," said Professor Binns slowly, "yes, one could argue that, I suppose." He peered at Hermione as though he had never seen a student properly before. "However, the legend of which you speak is such a *sensational*, even *ludicrous* tale-"

But the whole class was now hanging on Professor Binns' every word. He looked dimly at them all, every face turned to his. Ron could tell he was completely thrown by such an unusual show of

interest.

"Oh, very well," he said slowly. "Let me see… Chamber of Secrets…"

Professor Binns told them about Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw and Salazar Slytherin, the four greatest witches and wizards of the age, who founded Hogwarts over a thousand years ago (precise date uncertain). For years they worked together in harmony, seeking out youngsters who showed signs of magic and bringing them to the castle to be educated far away from prying Muggle eyes during a time witches and wizards suffered much persecution. Then a rift grew between Slytherin and the others because Slytherin wanted to be more *selective* about the students admitted to Hogwarts. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy. After a while, there was a serious argument on the subject between Slytherin and Gryffindor, and Slytherin left the school.

"Reliable historical sources tell us this much," said Professor Binns after a brief pause. "But these honest facts have been obscured by the fanciful legend of the Chamber of Secrets. The story goes that Slytherin had built a hidden chamber the castle, of which the founders knew nothing. Slytherin, according to legend, sealed the Chamber of Secrets so that none would be able to open it until his own true heir arrived at the school. The heir alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic."

There was an uneasy silence as everyone continued to watch him, hoping for more. Professor Binns looked faintly annoyed.

"The whole thing is arrant nonsense, of course," he said. "Naturally, the school has been searched for evidence of such a chamber, many times, by the most learned witches and wizards. It does not exist. A tale told to frighten the gullible."

"Sir-what exactly do you mean by the 'horror within' the Chamber?" asked Hermione.

"That is believed to be some sort of a monster, which the Heir of

Slytherin alone can control," said Professor Binns in his dry, reedy voice.

The class exchanged nervous looks.

"I tell you, the thing does not exist," said Professor Binns, shuffling his ghostly notes. "There is no Chamber and no monster."

"But sir," said Seamus, "if the Chamber can only be opened by Slytherin's true heir, no one else *would* be able to find it, would they?"

"Nonsense, O'Flaherty," said Professor Binns in an aggravated tone. "If a long succession of Hogwarts headmasters and headmistresses haven't found the thing-"

"But Professor," piped up Parvati, "you'd probably have to use Dark Magic to open it-"

"Just because a wizard *doesn't* use Dark Magic doesn't mean he *can't*, Miss Pennyfeather," snapped Professor Binns. "I repeat, if the likes of Dumbledore-"

"But maybe you've got to be related to Slytherin, so Dumbledore couldn't-" began Dean, but Professor Binns had enough.

"That will do," he said sharply. "It is a myth! It does not exist! There is not a shred of evidence that Slytherin built so much as a secret broom cupboard! I regret telling you such a foolish story! We will return, if you please, to *history*, to solid, believable, verifiable fact!"

Then within five minutes, the class sunk back into its usual torpor. No one spoke again until the bell rang and everyone left the History of Magic classroom to enter the teeming corridors.

"I always knew Salazar Slytherin was a twisted old loony," Ron told to Harry and Hermione as they fought their way through the crowd to drop off their bags for dinner. "But I never knew he was the one who started all this pure-blood stuff. I wouldn't be in his house even if you paid me. Honestly, if the Sorting Hat tried to put me in Slytherin I'd've taken the train back home…"

Hermione nodded fervently. Harry said nothing. He just worried the inside of his mouth as they were shunted along in the throng. On their way, Colin Creevey pasted by.

"Hiya, Harry!" said Colin, happy as always to greet Harry for any excuse, for as many times as possible.

Harry vaguely waved a hand at Colin's direction. Ron wondered why he bothered; he'd've ignored the annoying firstie within the first week.

"Harry-Harry-a boy said in my class that you solve mysteries! Are you…?"

But Colin was so small he couldn't fight against the tide of people bearing him towards the Great Hall; they heard him squeak, "See you, Harry!" and he was gone.

They made a turn and found themselves in the corridor where the attack had happened. They stopped and looked. The scene looked exactly like the night they discovered the writing on the wall, except there was no stiff cat hanging on the torch bracket, and an empty chair was leaning against the wall bearing the message: The Chamber of Secrets has been open. The corridor itself was deserted.

"Can't hurt to have a poke around," said Ron, waving at the scene.

They dropped their bags in the corner and started searching for clues.

"Scorch marks!" said Ron. "Here-and here-"

"Come and look at this!" said Hermione. "This is funny…"

Hermione was pointing at the top most pane of the window next to the message on the wall, where around twenty spiders were scuttling, apparently fighting to get through a small crack. A long, silvery thread was dangling like a rope, as though they had all climbed it in their hurry to get outside. Ron looked away and took several steps back the moment he realised it was spiders Hermione was pointing out.

"Have you ever seen spiders act like that?" Hermione said wonderingly. "Have you, Ron? Ron?"

She looked over her shoulder and frowned at Ron, who tried to recover his breathing.

"I-don't-like-spiders," he said tensely.

"I never knew that," said Hermione, looking at Ron in surprise. "You've used spiders in Potions loads of times…"

"I don't mind them dead," said Ron. "I just don't like the way they move…"

Hermione giggled.

"It's not funny!" said Ron fiercely. "If you must know, when I was three, Fred turned my - my teddy bear into a great filthy spider because I broke his toy broomstick… You wouldn't like them either if you'd been holding your bear and suddenly it had too many legs and…"

He shuddered. Hermione was still on the verge of laughing. Harry looked deeply sympathetic, though, and it suddenly occurred to Ron perhaps Harry's weird pork-phobia was like his deep hatred for spiders.

"Remember all the water on the floor?" said Hermione, thankfully changing the subject. "Where did it all come from? Someone mopped it all up."

"It was about here," said Ron, walking a few paces past Filch's chair and pointing. "Level with this door."

He reached for the brass doorknob to open it, until he realised what room the door belonged to. He withdrew his hand as though he'd been burned.

"Can't go in there," said Ron gruffly. "This is a girl's toilet."

"Oh, Ron, there won't be anyone in there," said Hermione, coming over. "That's Moaning Myrtle's place."

"Who?"

"Myrtle's a ghost haunting one of the toilets in here," said Hermione.

"She haunts a *toilet* ?"

"Yes. It's been out-of-order all year because she keeps having tantrums and flooding the place. I never went in there anyway if I could avoid it; it's awful trying to have a pee with her wailing at you. Anyway, let's have a look."

Ignoring the large OUT OF ORDER sign, she opened the door.

It was the gloomiest, most depressing toilet room Ron had ever seen. Under a large, cracked and spotted mirror were a row of chipped sinks. The floor was damp and reflected the dull light given off by the stubs of candles, burning low in their holders. The wooden doors to the stalls were flaking and scratched and one of them was dangling off its hinges. Hermione put her fingers to her lips and set off towards the end stall. When she reached it she said, "Hello, Myrtle, how are you?"

Harry and Ron went to look. A squat ghost of a girl was floating above the tank of the toilet, picking a spot on her chin, wearing the glummest face Ron had ever seen, half-hidden behind lank hair and thick, pearly spectacles.

"This is a *girl's* toilet," said Myrtle, eyeing Ron and Harry suspiciously. " *They're* not girls."

"No," Hermione agreed. "I just wanted to show them how-er-nice it is in here."

She waved vaguely at the dirty old mirror and the damp floor. Hermione was never a good liar.

"Ask her if she saw anything," Ron whispered at Hermione.

"What are you whispering?" said Myrtle, staring at him.

"Nothing," said Ron. "We wanted to ask-"

"I wish people would stop talking behind my back!" said Myrtle, in a voice choked with tears. "I *do* have feelings, you know, even if I *am* dead-"

"Myrtle, no one wants to upset you," said Hermione. "Ron only-"

"No one wants to upset me! That's a good one!" howled Myrtle. "My life was nothing but misery at this place and now people come along ruining my death!"

"We wanted to ask you if you've seen anything funny lately," said Hermione quickly. "A cat was attacked right outside your front door on Hallowe'en. Did you see anyone near here that night?"

"I wasn't paying attention," said Myrtle dramatically. "Peeves upset me so much I came in here to *kill* myself. Then, of course, I remembered that I'm-that I'm-"

"Already dead," said Ron helpfully.

Myrtle gave a tragic sob, rose up in the air, turned over, and dived headfirst into the toilet, splashing water all over them and vanishing from sight, although from the direction of her muffled sobs, she had come to rest somewhere in the U-bend.

Harry and Ron stood with their mouths open, but Hermione shrugged wearily and said, "Honestly, that was almost cheerful for Myrtle. Come on, let's go."

She had barely closed the door on Myrtle's gurgling sobs when a loud voice made all three of them jump.

"RON!"

Percy had stopped dead at the head of the stairs, prefect badge agleam, and an expression of complete shock on his face.

"That's a *girl's* toilet!" he gasped. "What were you-?"

Ron was about to say they were just looking around searching for clues, but Harry opened his mouth first.

"I really needed to pee."

… And just like that Harry started talking again. Percy was so thrown off he momentarily forgot he was angry.

"Get away from there," Percy said gruffly, striding towards them and starting to bustle them along, flapping his arms. "Don't you care what this looks like? Skulking around here while everyone's at dinner, especially you, Harry, after not talking for a week… Ginny seems to think you've been bewitched, I've never seen her so upset, crying her eyes out. You might think of *her*, all the first years are thoroughly overexcited by this business-"

" *You* don't care about Ginny," said Ron, feeling his ears reddening. " *You're* worried we're going to mess up your chances of being Head Boy-"

"Enough!" Percy said tersely, fingering his prefect badge. "Go to dinner or I'm taking off points! And no more troublesome behaviour from you or I'll write Mum!"

And he strode off, the back of his neck as red as Ron's ears.

Ron, Harry and Hermione ensconced in the music room to avoid Percy that night. Ron savagely practiced on the piano, missing the notes he normally had no trouble hitting out of his anger, Hermione worked on her Charms homework and Harry pored over his phone. Finally, frustrated at the mistakes he kept making, Ron slammed all his fingers on the keys and fumed. Hermione, surprisingly, didn't tell him off and shut her copy of *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2* .

"Who could it be, though?" she asked quietly, as if she was restarting a conversation they'd started earlier. "Who would want to frighten all the Muggle-borns out of Hogwarts?"

"Let me think," said Ron in mock puzzlement. "Who do we know thinks all Muggle-borns are scum?"

He looked at Hermione meaningfully. Hermione looked back, unconvinced.

"If you're talking about Malfoy-"

"Of course I am!" said Ron. "You heard him-' *You'll be next, Mudbloods!* '- come on, you've only got to look at his foul rat face to know it's him-"

"Malfoy, the heir of Slytherin?" said Hermione sceptically.

"Look at his family!" cried Ron. "The whole lot of them have been in Slytherin! They could easily be Slytherin's descendants. His father's definitely evil enough, being a top You-Know-Who supporter and all. They could've had the key to the Chamber of Secret for centuries! Handing it down, father to son…"

"Well," said Hermione cautiously, "I suppose it's possible…"

"But how do we prove it?" said Ron darkly.

"Let's back up a bit," said Harry, speaking as if he never took a break from talking. "The heir of Slytherin can open the Chamber of Secrets and control the monster inside. There's definitely a *monster* involved, seeing as Mrs. Norris was petrified and even Dumbledore couldn't cure her immediately."

"Makes you think the attack was done by something not human," Hermione agreed.

"And while it's possible Malfoy has the key to the Chamber of Secrets, he's iffy on the controlling monster part," Harry continued. "Remember how much trouble we had with a baby dragon? The monster's got to be somewhere on the same level. How do you tame a monster anyway? There's definitely something we're missing."

"But you can't deny he has some hand in this," Ron argued. "Otherwise he wouldn't have said what he did on Hallowe'en."

"True," said Hermione. "That's what we need to find out. It's going to very difficult, of course. And dangerous- very dangerous. We'd be breaking fifty school rules, I expect…"

"If, in a month or so, you feel like explaining you'll tell us, won't you?"

said Ron irritably.

"Alright," Hermione snapped. "The quickest way to find out is questioning Malfoy in the Slytherin Common Room without him knowing it's us."

"Impossible," Harry said as Ron laughed.

"No, it's not," said Hermione. "We just have to take a bit of polyjuice potion."

"The potion that lets you turn into someone else?" said Harry, eyebrows raised. "Hermione, you do realise it's a N.E.W.T. level potion, we don't know how to make it, and we probably won't even have the right ingredients even if we had the recipe?"

"We can figure out the details after we get the instructions!" said Hermione, waving off Harry's argument impatiently. "Snape said the recipe is a book called *Moste Potente Potions* and it's bound to be in the Restricted Section. We'll need a signed note for that."

"Who's gonna give us a note?" said Ron. "Hard to see why we'd want the book if weren't trying to make one of the potions."

"I think," said Hermione. "If we make it sound as though we're just interested in the theory, we might stand a chance."

"C'mon, no teacher's going to fall for that," said Ron. "They'd have to be really thick…"

"Or I could ask Malfoy and save you all the trouble," said someone.

They all looked over their shoulder. Julia was standing at the entrance, hugging her bag.

"How long have you been here?" Hermione squeaked.

"Why are you here anyway?" Ron demanded.

"Since Harry mentioned it's possible Malfoy has the key to the Chamber of Secrets, and I come here every evening," Julia replied in order. At Ron's scepticism, she cocked an eyebrow. "Aunt Jackie

is my *Aunt* ."

"Why would Malfoy answer your questions and not be suspicious?" asked Harry, frowning.

"He keeps trying to talk to me," said Julia simply. "I keep my answers short and civil. Sometimes I even talk back."

"You're friendly with *Draco Malfoy* ?" said Ron incredulously. "Don't you realise he's a foul, nasty little-"

"I know Malfoy is a disgusting toe rag, you don't have to convince me," said Julia.

"Then why are you civil to him?" Ron argued.

"What does me thinking Malfoy is a disgusting toe rag have anything to do with how I should treat him?" Julia argued back. "Look, you want to know if Malfoy has a connection to the attack on Mrs. Norris, right? I can help you on that, and you don't have to risk breaking fifty school rules if I do. Maybe I'll luck out and the Q&A will give me an excuse to tell him to piss off the next time he tries to talk to me."

Harry looked as deeply put-out by this as Ron was. Nevertheless, he didn't push the issue.

"I want to listen in when you do," said Harry gruffly.

"He usually tries to chat up when I'm in the library. It's not very hard to eavesdrop in there," said Julia.

"Let's stick to phones and not risk detection," said Harry, scowling at his phone. "I have an earpiece and wireless microphone you can use. And no, don't ask. You don't ask 'why' for this sort of thing when Sherlock Holmes is your guardian."

"That reminds me, we should tell Sherlock about the Chamber of Secrets," said Hermione. "If anyone can figure out what the monster is and who's controlling it, it's him."

"Done it already," said Harry. "We'll have to wait a bit though. He overworked himself for a case in the Continent, so John confiscated

his phone and duct-taped him to the bed."

Final Notes : Lockhart ended up being called Haemorrhoids and Back-Pain after I typed My-Colleague-Who-Shall-Remain-Anonymous once. I never thought I'd excavate my old electrical engineering textbooks and *read them* for any reason, but apparently I can for fanfic. The magic-powered electric generator takes its inspiration from wind-powered electric generators. I figured it's more feasible for a second year. I've intentionally overlooked the fact the windmill itself could act like an antenna without proper EM immunity and just focused on the charge controller.

Sherlock doesn't make it to Hogwarts, sorry. I tried to reason with John, but John said NO. But he'll definitely show up in the next chapter.

Canyons of the Mind

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Four: Canyons of the Mind

John rummaged through the medicine cabinet whilst savouring the immense relief that came with the knowledge Sherlock was safely sequestered in the bedroom. The Prague case turned out to be a harrowing one, requiring Sherlock to work eighteen hours days for two months straight. Sherlock had sent John back to London after the first month because from thereon out the case required deep undercover work, and, as much as it hurt to admit it, John simply couldn't do subterfuge. At the end of October, news reached John that Sherlock had unravelled the biggest swindling operation in recent Eastern European memory. The ringleader was at the point of bankrupting many countries and was incidentally responsible for the mass grave in Prague. Radio silence prevailed on news regarding Sherlock's welfare and location until Mycroft texted an address in East Germany.

John had found Sherlock in a darkened hotel room, completely prostrate on the bed and as thin as a wraith. He didn't react when John quietly settled next to him. His white, claw-like hand twitched when John ran a hand through his matted curls.

"I think I should consider a more placid line in life," Sherlock said into the pillow.

That was tantamount to Sherlock admitting defeat, so John wasted no time bundling him back home. That was about a week ago. Sherlock had improved enough to emerge from nervous prostration to the comparatively preferred state of bored and irritable. John gave him another week for his body catch up to his brain-or a couple of hours, if he took the pepper-up potion Snape had owled several months back.

John chuckled over the last thought. *I'm a modern doctor subscribing to witch medicine. My life is absurd.*

John found the corked bottle on the top shelf. After taking it down, John strode into the first floor bedroom where Sherlock was still duct-taped to the bed and flopped right on top him.

"Get off of me, you tyrannical harpy!" Sherlock snarled.

Yep, he was definitely feeling better, John decided, and dangled the bottle of pepper-up potion in front of his face.

"No pepper-up then? Oookaaay."

Sherlock immediately wrapping his legs, which he somehow freed, around John like a Venus flytrap that suffered a period of draught. John could easily break out of the hold without employing any grappling manoeuvres, but…

"Give it to me," Sherlock wheedled, all dewy-eyed and trembling-lips. " *Please* ."

… it was a bit difficult when your adult-child of a husband used emotional blackmail.

"I should just let you heal at normal pace," said John as she uncorked the bottle. "You're a lot easier to manage when you're literally tied to one place."

John held the bottle to Sherlock's lips and he tipped it all in one go. In a few seconds his ears started smoking, and his grip around John presented serious grappling manoeuver level challenges. The glint in Sherlock's eyes certainly promised it was going to take some furious wrestling to get out of the current hold.

Two hours later, both John and Sherlock were immaculately dressed and at the sitting room table, drinking tea.

"Harry has a case, by the way," said John conversationally. "Someone petrified the caretaker's cat put up a bigoted message up a wall."

"Details?" Sherlock rumbled.

John swivelled the laptop around so Sherlock could read the email Harry had typed up. Sherlock read through it with a tiny frown.

"I'm more appalled at the wizard's inability to cope with logic than I am at the incident itself," Sherlock concluded.

"Obvious, then?" asked John.

"Disgustingly so," Sherlock confirmed.

"Figures you'd solve a mystery wizards and witches couldn't make heads or tails for a millennium," John remarked. "Please do us a favour and let them know: can't let it distract Harry from his magical education."

"That's precisely what he seems to be lacking," Sherlock grumbled. "Anyone who'd finished first year should be able to figure this one out."

"That minimal?" said John, "Walk me through it, please?"

"The Chamber of Secrets is supposed to contain a monster," Sherlock explained. "It's also associated with the House of Slytherin, which emblem is a snake. Snake type of monster sounds good then. What snake-type of monster exist that can kill you at a glance?"

It clicked immediately. "A Basilisk," Then John frowned. "But hang on. The cat was *petrified*, not killed."

"Harry noted there was a large puddle of water on the floor when the cat was discovered. It's far more likely the cat saw the *reflection* of the Basilisk, not the Basilisk itself. Magic being as it is, the reflection soften the blow, but didn't completely remove the effects."

"Makes sense," said John, nodding and texting at the same time. "*There* ; told Dumbledore the beast is a Basilisk."

Sherlock grunted, clearly disappointed at the mystery. In about twenty minutes, Dumbledore texted back.

"Okay, Dumbledore agrees with you," said John. "Now he just has to find the person who has the ability to control a snake that can kill you if it looks at you in the eye. Wonder how you can do that? Just ask it politely, please don't look at me and look at something else- Sherlock?"

Sherlock's entire face transformed. It took a while for John to realise the expression: horror.

"… I wasn't thinking," Sherlock muttered furiously. "I need to go to Hogwarts."

"But you just said this was-"

"Think!" Sherlock shouted. "The Basilisk is wretchedly difficult to control. Even indirect eye-contact can harm you. How does a person communicate with a *beast* anyway? Normally the answer is one *can't*, but we know someone who has the ability to speak to snakes."

"We do?" said John blankly.

"London Zoo, John!" said Sherlock impatiently. "Don't tell me you forgot the time we went to the reptile house-"

The same horror crawled up to John's face.

"But-but Harry couldn't have," John protested.

"Couldn't he?"

John leaned away from the table, appalled at the suggestion.

"You don't actually think he did it," John whispered. "You *can't* ."

"It doesn't matter whether I do," said Sherlock, his face like a mask. "The problem is whether *other* people do."

John gripped the edge of the table, white-knuckled. "… Dumbledore knows Harry can speak to snakes."

"So does McGonagall. Snape, too, most likely."

"Oh, God…"

That moment, John's phone chirped. John warily glanced at the new text.

"… *Jack*," John sighed in relief. "I can't believe I forgot she's there."

"Ask her if I can view the crime scene," Sherlock demanded, leaning over the table and grasping at John phone.

John kept him at arms-length, which wouldn't have helped much since Sherlock's arms were longer, but did because John's hand was planted on his face and John held the phone on the opposite side.

"Okay, so the first crime scene is too old and it's been scrubbed down. But there was another attack last night," John said, reading through the series of texts. "Victim was a first year kid. Petrified just like the caretaker's cat. Dumbledore thinks he was sneaking off to visit Harry at the Hospital Wing- wait, hang on, why was Harry in the Hospital Wing? I thought he got over the colds."

John fired off the question. Jacqueline took her time to respond. This usually meant she was trying to find a tactful but truthful way of conveying some pretty bad news.

"He broke his arm in the last Quidditch match?" John said, frowning deeply.

"But it only takes *seconds* to mend broken bones in the wizard world!" Sherlock growled, stilling grasping blindly. "Why did he stay overnight?"

John texted that question. Jacqueline took an even longer time to compose the response. The answer made it clear there was no nice way to relay the news.

"LOCKHART *REMOVED* ALL THE BONES IN HIS RIGHT ARM *?* !" John screeched.

"HOW IS HE STILL TEACHING *!* ?" Sherlock roared.

John released the hold on Sherlock and started typing furiously. Sherlock watched the slipping fingers and backspacing for five seconds before snatching the phone out of John's hands. John was disinclined to rein him in.

"Go all out, Sherlock," John snarled.

"As if I would do anything else," said Sherlock, baring his teeth.

"Oh, dear, they're not happy," said Ms. Shin mournfully as her phone kept pinging inside the Headmaster's office. She read the volley texts and turned bright pink. "Um, I don't think I should directly relay the recent messages."

Severus was deeply curious as to how John Watson responded. "We're all adults here," he drawled.

"The phrasing makes me believe it was Mr. Holmes who responded," said Ms. Shin.

Severus didn't want to know how Sherlock Holmes responded. "Humph."

Dumbledore massaged an eyebrow, smiling ruefully.

"It never ceases to amaze me how Mr. Holmes is capable of such brilliance and exasperation," he said.

"My brother-in-law says the same," said Ms. Shin sympathetically.

"Be that as it may," said Severus, "He did give us a vital clue."

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed. "We will have to position roosters in all halls to protect the students, first off. The next step is discovering the person who is orchestrating the attacks."

"You don't posit Potter has anything to do with the attacks, despite knowing he is a Parselmouth?" Severus sneered.

"No, Severus, I do not think Harry has had any hand in the attacks," said Dumbledore firmly.

"Surely it is possible a highly skilled wizard or witch is manipulating Potter with the Imperius curse at the very least," Severus argued.

Dumbledore's eyes sparkled in a deeply uneasy way.

"Well, then, Severus," said Dumbledore casually. "If you feel so strongly about it, then I shall leave it to you to convey your suspicions to Harry's parents. They do, after all, have the right to know."

To Ms. Shin's credit, her face betrayed no emotion or reaction whatsoever.

"Unfortunately, I do not have the happy power of voicing my opinions to the parents of Gryffindor students," Severus countered.

"But seeing as you are the one who holds this view, I believe you should be the one to convey it," Dumbledore parried. "Surely you're not afraid of them?"

Ms. Shin remained resolutely expressionless. Severus scowled fiercely at the headmaster, who twinkled back at him. The old man brought Ms. Shin as audience to keep him from using some very choice words, he was sure of it.

"Oh, very well," Severus snapped. "I shall leave immediately to prevent this from blowing out of proportion."

"Thank you, Severus," said Dumbledore gravely. "Now, Jacqueline, regarding Mr. Holmes's request to view the crime scene…"

Severus didn't hear the rest of the conversation because he'd already left the headmaster's office. He didn't bother to linger because he didn't think even *Dumbledore* would be stupid enough to let a Muggle inside Hogwarts. About fifteen minutes later Severus found himself inside the infamous Baker Street flat.

"Hello, Snape," said Watson. The tone was as friendly and welcoming as usual, but there was stiffness about the expression that made Severus feel slightly apprehensive-for someone else. "Didn't think you'd come in person."

"Dumbledore insisted," said Severus.

"I was almost hoping he'd send Back-Pai… *Lockhart*," said Watson, correcting the stumble too late. "I want to have a word with him, but he's not responding."

Severus briefly indulged in the darkly pleasant fantasy of Watson challenging Lockhart to a duel; there were many broken bones and knockouts in the daydream. Sherlock Holmes, who was also present, ignored them in favour of the timeline he written and posted on the wall, rubbing his palms and pacing furiously.

"Entire length of summer, all Owl-post to this address was appropriated by a House-elf," Holmes suddenly erupted. "July 24th, the same House-elf warns Harry there is a plot waiting to unfold in Hogwarts, and tries to dissuade him from going to school. August 15th, someone removes my memory in Diagon Alley. September 1st, barrier to 9 and ¾ closes inexplicably. First attack happens October 31st, second attack happens November 5th; both incidents involve a Basilisk and none of the victims saw the snake directly. How did the second victim avoid direct eye contact?"

It took Severus a second to realise the question was directed at him.

"He had a camera."

"No pictures were taken, I presume?"

"It melted."

"Obviously," sneered Holmes, before moving on: "The only safe way control a Basilisk is speaking its language. Snake language exists. If ordering a common grass snake is no different from ordering a Basilisk, then there are three possibilities: we are dealing with an agent who can speak snake language and is directly ordering the events, an agent who is in league with or manipulating someone

who can speak snake language, or the agent is using a recording of snake language to control the Basilisk. My tests on snake language clearly indicate one needs only a recording to make snakes obey commands. The actual person who speaks the language is unnecessary."

Severus somehow wasn't surprised Holmes had tested the parameters of Parseltongue.

"Spells that allow one to manipulate people must exist," Holmes continued. "The intent parameters are simple enough: *do my command* . The fundamental mechanics of spells is that it must let the caster focus on a single concept or intent. Incantations, wand-movement and such are mere tools to aid the caster to focus on the intent. Also, as long as the intent behind the spell does not violate the Law of Non-Contradiction, the spell can be done. It is foolish to think someone has not thought up a spell than can override another person's will and didn't use it."

"You speak of the Imperius Curse," said Severus, surprised that Holmes deduced its existence from reasoning alone.

"Not the incantation I would've used, but the concept is the same," said Holmes haughtily. "But here is the catch: the permanency of a spell depends on the caster's strength, the nature of the spell, and, in this case, the nature of the command. The command that would cover most options is: *find the muggle-borns and attack them with the Basilisk without getting caught; otherwise act normally* . This is a *trifold* command, which goes directly against the principle that a spell should focus on only one intention."

That was true, Severus had to acknowledge. A powerful wizard might be able to enforce two indefinite commands via the Imperius Curse, but not three.

"The crime itself presents itself as political/ideological one," Holmes went on. "But if this was really an ideological crime, the instigating party would claim responsibility for the attack since media attention is usually their goal. But there have been no such moves. It is far more likely someone is using the supposedly ideological crime to discredit someone else for their own gain. Dumbledore is one

possible target, but this doesn't exclude the possibility the true instigator is using a student who, upon discovery, would discredit the parents by association."

Watson pondered this.

"Either way," said Watson. "The intended victim of this crime is someone who publically *doesn't* support pure-blood superiority. Otherwise it wouldn't cause that big of a scandal."

"Ah, good you follow," said Holmes, nodding at Watson in approval. "Regardless of whether he was the primary target or not, Dumbledore can hardly avoid being affected by this incident. Dumbledore has his share of enemies, certainly. It is impossible not to when he was heading the first resistance against Voldemort."

Severus hissed at the mention of the Dark Lord's name. " *Don't say his name* !"

Both Holmes and Watson stared at him.

"Sorry, Snape," said Watson, "Never thought *you'd* have a problem."

"Oh, for god's sakes, it's just a name," Holmes groused.

"We don't know what magic can do when you even *say* the name," Watson pointed out. "Either way it's rude. Let's err on the side of caution, shall we?"

" *Dull*," Holmes huffed. "Why bother when he is virtually dead if not properly so?"

"I'm not chancing it until I'm convinced he's completely and utterly dead," Watson retorted. "Now something tells me you already know who might have done it. You keep circling around the 'how' and not on the 'who's'."

"It's obvious, surely?" said Holmes. "It's Lucius Malfoy."

"And here I thought you were being objective and reasonable enough to at least *consider* your child as an unwitting agent when you mentioned the Imperius Curse," Severus drawled.

"Oh, get your head out of your a-hole, Snape!" Watson growled. "You need to know Harry can speak to snakes to use him. The only people in the world who knows Harry can speak to snakes are you, Dumbledore and McGonagall. Dumbledore and McGonagall wouldn't leak that info. I don't think you would either."

"Why not?" asked Severus.

"Dumbledore would've told you not to, and you don't go against him directly," replied Watson. "You're not above dropping hints, mind, but when you hit people, you make sure no one can't hit back when you break their face."

Severus felt his lips curling into a smirk at Watson's highly accurate assessment of his philosophy of attack.

"And bigotry always has its foundations in lifting one's self-worth at the expense of others," said Holmes. "Not Harry's style. You're far more likely to see him indulge in moral superiority than this. So that rules out the possibility of Harry as the direct agent."

Severus smirk widened. He didn't think Holmes would share his assessment of Potter's character.

"Yes, Harry is a very moral person, unlike you two bastards," grumbled Watson, looking mostly exasperated, and yet still fond. "So why do you think it is Lucius Malfoy, Sherlock? Not that I don't think he's incapable of it, but I thought he likes his prestige too much to actually try something this big, blatant and obvious."

"Yes, Holmes, do tell us why you think Lucius Malfoy would potentially expose his precious son to danger by unleashing a Basilisk in Hogwarts," drawled Severus. "After all, a Basilisk doesn't actually *recognise* whether a wizard is a pure-blood or not."

"From that alone you can tell Lucius Malfoy didn't know it was a *Basilisk* that would be unleashed," said Holmes. "He probably laid his confidence on the fact the 'Heir of Slytherin' would not harm anyone in his own house. So far his confidence has been proven true. The first year victim was a Muggle-born Gryffindor, I believe?"

Severus nodded curtly.

"An intelligent agent, then," Holmes muttered, "One that knows when, who and where to strike. But one that didn't, until this year, *activate* . Something triggered the agent. The current Magical world is readying for a new Muggle Protection Act. The papers said as much. We know from multiple sources that Lucius Malfoy is against the passing of this Act. His deliberate goading of Arthur Weasley, who is advocating the Act, at Diagon Alley is suspicious. Why such a public display of hostility? His type prefers to secretly put poison in a well he knows his enemy uses."

"Maybe because he knew it would get away with it?" said Watson. "He was in for the humiliation, remember."

"He can do that any time he wants, especially in a place where he's unlikely to gain unwanted media attention," snapped Holmes. "If Hogwarts in *particular* was the place he wanted to target-thus felling *both* Arthur Weasley and Dumbledore-then he would go to the time and place where he knows Arthur's entire family will be present."

"Which is Diagon Alley, when everyone is out doing school shopping," said Watson, nodding. "Who would suspect a parent out doing the shopping with their kid?"

"Yes, obviously," said Holmes. "And do you recall the way he was clutching-Snape, get out of my head."

Severus stopped his nonverbal attempt at Legilimens. Despite his previous vow to refrain from attempting it again, Severus wanted to see if he could at least view Holmes' past memories like a normal person.

"What's wrong? What do you mean?" asked Watson, looking concerned.

"Snape is highly ambitious mind reader who just tried to read my mind," Holmes snarled.

Watson gaped. " *What?* "

Severus sighed, aggrieved at Holmes and wary of Watson's

reaction. "Couldn't you have at least waited until you could properly use this knowledge against me?"

"It's not my fault you're practically giving yourself away," Holmes retorted. "Every time you read my mind, you slow down my thinking to excruciating levels. If you're want insider information, at least keep up."

Severus felt affronted at the allegation that his brain was slower than Holmes', despite the fact it probably *was* .

"Hold there right now," Watson interrupted. "Snape, you can read *minds* ?"

Severus nodded warily.

"What the heck are you doing as a school teacher and not the head of intelligence?" Watson exclaimed. "Mind-reading, that's brilliant! I bet it's one of the subtle things you're so good at. How do you do it?"

That was not typical response. Unable to help himself, Severus gave an incredulous look at Holmes. Holmes shook his head minutely. It was as he suspected; even Holmes couldn't understand the existence of John Watson.

"Not now, John," said Holmes. "The important thing is: Therein lies the gap in my memory. I remember thinking Lucius Malfoy's behaviour was suspicious, but I don't have any memory of observing his suspicious behaviour."

"And there's no way you would have observed *nothing*," said Watson. "You bent down to check Ginny's Cauldron, I remember, probably to see if he planted something in there. But you forgot because of that spell. Either way, you didn't forget thinking Lucius Malfoy was suspicious because the memory charm didn't cover that."

"It also means the question is not *who*, but *how*," said Holmes. "Any evidence that ties the current attacks to Lucius Malfoy are now gone. Fingerprints: overwritten. My eyewitness testimony: gone, never to be taken seriously. The only thing we can do now is finding

out *how* the attacks are taking place."

" *Brilliant*," said Watson breathlessly. "You don't even let magic-induced amnesia to stop you."

Severus certainly never met a Muggle who worked around memory charms by sheer logic alone. As for Holmes, he waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him immensely.

"We should check up on Ginny Weasley," said Watson thoughtfully. "When you think about it, she really is an ideal victim for Lucius Malfoy: new student, doesn't know much magic, and Arthur's only baby girl. Double whammy."

Severus recalled the little red-headed girl. He remembered thinking she was oddly withdrawn for a Gryffindor and a Weasley. Even Percy Weasley, for all his pompous seriousness, wasn't *withdrawn* in class.

"And check if the message was written within reach of a girl her size," said Holmes. "If she was manipulated into writing it, she would've done it by hand."

Ah, that explained why the message was written at such a low height, Severus thought, "Certainly."

"Any advice on recovering Sherlock's memory, Snape?" asked Watson, in the familiar guileless manner of a student asking the expert that made the questions endearing not annoying. "This is your sphere of expertise."

"Well, Watson," said Severus, lips twitching. "You must realise the mind is not a book, to be opened at will and examined at leisure or tear out individual pieces from. Thoughts are not etched on the inside of skulls, to be perused by any invader. The mind is a complex and many-layered thing. As such, memory recovery is not a simple matter."

"Makes sense," said Watson. "Scientific literature on human cognition and memory say the same thing. You can literally carve

out pieces out of a brain, but still retain some function and memories as long as the synapses aren't permanently damaged. Stimulating the brain directly also let people have temporary perfect recall."

So Muggles realised this too. Good. He didn't need to belabour the point then. "The problem with memory charms is that it doesn't remove the memory itself, but it blocks out the memory triggers. Even a person whose memory had been 'modified' can still, with the right combination of enchantments, produce the actual memory for someone else to examine even if they themselves cannot recall them. "

"So it's not the data that's done, it's the access that's been removed," said Watson.

"Correct," said Severus. "Trying to recover access has more often than not wrought more permanent damage. The mind is a delicate thing. Trying to retrieve lost memories without the proper access is like tearing away at the mind itself."

"I understand," Watson sighed. "I just can't stand the idea of someone messing up Sherlock mind, even a little bit."

Holmes had a very unreadable expression on his face as he studied the back of Watson's head intently. Severus resisted the urge to read his mind again.

"So here is where we stand," said Holmes, abruptly turning away. "An unknown agent is attacking the students using a Basilisk. The Basilisk's location is unknown. The agent was triggered into acting via Lucius Malfoy, who planted the trigger. The trigger is a small object, and not something a young student would regard with suspicion otherwise Ginny Weasley, the probable and unwitting carrier, wouldn't bring it to school. The agent has the ability to control people: either by spell or other means. The agent also either has the ability to a control snakes via snake language or has the ability to find and manipulate a person who speaks snake language - in this case, Harry - or knows enough about snake language to mimic it. The former ability may or may not overlap with the latter ability."

Severus nodded. It was nice to have someone who didn't flinch at considering all the dark possibilities, even if it involved their own child.

"I will tell the Headmaster to examine Miss Weasley and Mr. Watson," said Severus. "Unless something happened in the interval, no doubt we will recover the dark object that has been enchanting her-and possibly him."

"Done that," said Watson, raising the perennial phone. "He's calling them up to his office."

Severus nodded in approval. The Muggles' lightning-fast communication methods were their few saving graces.

"If that is all?" asked Severus before preparing to Apparate.

"Just one more thing," said Watson, looking grim. "Do you know of *any* way I can file a complaint against Lockhart?"

Severus did; several as a matter of fact.

"And be exquisite in your cruelty," Holmes added.

Severus felt an evil smile creep over his face. Oh, he knew just the thing…

Harry raced through the halls on the same Sunday morning, his mind churning with information. The bright winter sunlight streaming through the high windows seemed incongruous after the unexpected grim news he received in the last twenty-four hours. He'd checked the Gryffindor Tower, but Ron and Hermione weren't there. As he passed by the Library, Percy Weasley strolled out of it, in very good spirits.

"Oh, hello, Harry," he said, "Excellent flying yesterday, really excellent. Gryffindor has just taken the lead in the House Cup. You earned fifty points!"

"Thanks. Have you seen Ron or Hermione by any chance?"

"Ron said he's going to the Music Room," said Percy, looking a bit amazed, "Never thought he'd get so into it."

Harry had a suspicion Ron had more than just piano practice in mind when he mentioned the Music Room. Harry headed to music chamber after shrugging noncommittally at Percy. There, one of the pianos had a noise-cancelling screen drawn around it. The screens were charmed so sound could go outside-in, but not inside-out, so students could practice without bothering others and not miss the bell.

"It's me," said Harry just outside.

There was a pause. Then one of the curtains drew sideways and Hermione's eye peered through the small opening.

" *Harry!* " she said. "You gave us such a fright-come in-how's your arm?"

"Fine," said Harry, squeezing into the confines of the screen. The piano had the keyboard cover down, and Harry's microphone receiver was on top of it.

"We'd've come to meet you, but Julia said she was going to wait for Malfoy in the Library," Ron explained as Harry, with difficulty, closed the screen. "We've decided this is the safest place to listen in."

Harry started to tell them about Colin, but Hermione interrupted.

"We already know-we heard Professor McGonagall telling Professor Flitwick this morning. That's why we decided we'd better get going."

"The sooner we get a confession out of Malfoy, the better," snarled Ron. "D'you know what I think? He was in such a foul temper after the Quidditch match, he took it out on Colin."

"We still don't know if it's him or not, but it's possible," said Harry. "There's something else-Dobby came to visit me in the middle of the night."

Ron and Hermione looked up, amazed. Harry started to recount what happened last night…

Harry had woken up hours and hours after taking *Skele-grow* in pitch blackness and gave a small yelp of pain: His arm felt like it was full of splinters. For a second, he thought it was the pain that woke him up. Then, in a thrill of horror, he realised that someone was sponging his forehead in the dark.

"Get off!" he shouted, and then, " *Dobby!* "

The house-elf's goggling tennis-ball eyes were peering at Harry through the darkness. A single tear was running down his long, pointed nose.

"Harry Potter came back to school," he whispered miserably. "Dobby warned and warned Harry Potter. Ah sir, why didn't you heed Dobby? Why didn't Harry Potter go back home when he missed the train?"

Harry heaved himself up on his pillows and pushed Dobby's sponge out of the way.

"What are you doing here? And how did you know I missed the train?"

Dobby's lips trembled and Harry was seized by a sudden suspicion.

"It was *you* !" he said slowly. "You stopped the barrier from letting me through!"

"Indeed yes, sir," said Dobby, nodding his head vigorously, ears flapping. "Dobby hid and watched for Harry Potter and sealed the gateway. Dobby first tried to make sure only Harry Potter would not go through, but then he sealed the gateway completely because Harry Potter kept trying. Dobby had to iron his hands afterwards-" he showed Harry ten long, bandaged fingers- "but Dobby didn't care, sir, for he thought Harry Potter was safe, and *never* did Dobby dream that Harry Potter would get to school another way!"

He was rocking backward and forward, shaking his ugly head.

"Dobby was so shocked when he heard Harry Potter was back at

Hogwarts, he let his master's dinner burn! Such a flogging Dobby never had, sir…"

"You're lucky Lockhart is so incompetent he removes bones instead of mending them," Harry snapped irritably, "because otherwise I might've strangled you."

Dobby smiled weakly.

"Dobby is used to death threats, sir. Dobby gets them five times a day at home."

He blew his nose on a corner of his filthy pillowcase he wore, looking so pathetic that Harry felt sorry for him in spite of himself.

"Why are you wearing that thing, Dobby?" he asked curiously.

"This, sir?" said Dobby, plucking at his pillowcase. "'Tis a mark of the house-elf's enslavement, sir. Dobby can only be freed if his masters present him with clothes, sir. The family is careful not to pass Dobby even a sock, sir, for then he would be free to leave their house forever."

Dobby mopped his bulging eyes. Then the elf said suddenly: "Harry Potter *must* go home! Dobby thought his Bludger would be enough to make-"

" *Your* Bludger?" said Harry, anger rising. "What d'you mean, *your* Bludger? *You* made the Bludger try to kill me?"

"Not kill you, sir, never kill you!" said Dobby, shocked. "Dobby wants to save Harry Potter's life! Better sent home, grievously injured, than remain here sir! Dobby only wanted Harry Potter hurt enough to be sent home!"

"Oh, is that all?" said Harry sarcastically. "Good thing I only got off with a broken arm, then. Can you at least tell me *why* you want me sent home in pieces?"

"Ah, if only Harry Potter knew!" Dobby groaned, more tears dripping onto his ragged pillowcase. "If he knew what he means to us, to the lowly, the enslaved, we dregs of the magical world! Dobby

remembers how it was when He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was at the height of his powers, sir! We house-elfs were treated like vermin, sir! Of course, Dobby is still treated like that, sir," he admitted, drying his face on the pillowcase. "But mostly, sir, life has improved for my kind since you triumphed over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Harry Potter survived, and the Dark Lord's power was broken, and it was a new dawn, sir, and Harry Potter shown like a beacon of hope for those of us who thought the Dark Days would never end, sir… And now, at Hogwarts, terrible things are to happen, are perhaps happening already, and Dobby cannot let Harry Potter stay here now that history is to repeat itself, now that the Chamber of Secrets is open once more-"

Dobby froze, horror-struck, then grabbed Harry's water jug from his bedside table and cracked it over his own head, toppling out of sight. A second later, he crawled back onto the bed, cross-eyed, muttering, "Bad Dobby, very bad Dobby…"

It took Harry a lot of effort to keep the volley of questions from exploding out of his mouth. Dobby just let two bits of important information slip: there *was* a Chamber of Secrets, and it had been opened once *before* . When? How? Who? If Dobby's family were the ones orchestrating the attacks, they would take the precaution of ordering Dobby to never tell it was them. *"A house-elf must always keep the family secrets*," Dobby had said this past summer. Was that the reason behind the hint? Don't waste his breath asking *who*, but something else? But what should he be asking if he couldn't ask *who* ?

"Why am I in danger?" asked Harry. "I'm not Muggle-born."

"Ah, sir, ask no more of poor Dobby," stammered the elf, his eyes huge in the dark. "Dark deeds are planned in this place, but Harry Potter must not be here when they happen-go home, Harry Potter, go home. Harry Potter must not meddle in this, sir, 'tis too dangerous-"

"I can't!" Harry said fiercely. "Half of my friends are Muggle-born! One of my *best friends* is Muggle-born! They'll be first in line if the Chamber really is opened!"

"Harry Potter risks his own life for his friends!" moaned Dobby in a kind of miserable ecstasy. "So noble! So valiant! But he must save himself, he must, Harry Potter must not-"

Dobby suddenly froze, his bat ears quivering. Harry heard it, too. There were footsteps coming down the passageway outside.

"Dobby must go!" breathed the elf, terrified. There was a loud crack, and he was gone. Harry slumped back into bed, his eyes on the dark doorway to the hospital wing as the footsteps drew nearer.

Dumbledore backed into the dormitory, wearing a long woolly dressing gown and a nightcap, carrying one end of what looked like a statue, Professor McGonagall appearing a second later carrying its feet. Together, they heaved it onto a bed. Harry raised himself a few inches so he could look at the statue on the bed. A ray of moonlight lay across its staring face.

It was Colin Creevey.

"… The Chamber of Secrets has been opened *before* ?" Hermione said when Harry finished speaking.

"This settles it," said Ron in a triumphant voice. "Lucius Malfoy must've opened the Chamber when he was at school here and now he's told dear old Draco how to do it. It's obvious. Wish Dobby'd told you what kind of monster's in there, though. I want to know how come nobody's noticed it sneaking around the school."

"Maybe it can make itself invisible," said Hermione. "Or maybe it can disguise itself - pretend to be a suit of armour or something - I've read about Chameleon Ghouls-"

"You read too much, Hermione," said Ron.

"It's actually something worse than that," said Harry. "Sherlock just got back to me this morning… he figured out what the monster is."

Ron and Hermione gaped open-mouthed.

"What is it *!* ?"

"It's a Basilisk," Harry answered.

Harry opened up his copy of *Fantastic Beast and Where to Find Them* to show them the relevant entry:

Basilisk (also known as the King of Serpents)

M.O.M. Classification: XXXXX

The first recorded Basilisk was bred by Herpo the Foul, a Greek Dark wizard and Parselmouth, who discovered after much experimentation that a chicken egg hatched beneath a toad would produce a gigantic serpent possessed of extraordinarily dangerous powers.

The Basilisk is a brilliant green serpent that may reach up to fifty feet in length. The male has a scarlet plume upon its head. It has exceptionally venomous fangs but its most dangerous means of attack is the gaze of its large yellow eyes. Anyone looking directly into these will suffer instant death.

If the food source is sufficient (the Basilisk will eat all mammals and birds and most reptiles), the serpent may attain a very great age. Herpo the Foul's Basilisk is believed to have lived for close on nine hundred years.

The creation of Basilisks has been illegal since medieval times, although the practice is easily concealed by simply removing the chicken egg from beneath the toad when the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures comes to call. However, since Basilisks are uncontrollable except by Parselmouths, they are as dangerous to most Dark wizards as to anybody else, and there have been no recorded sightings of Basilisks in Britain for at least four hundred years.

"A *snake* monster," Hermione breathed, "Of *course* ."

"How is a *fifty-foot long* snake moving around Hogwarts undetected?" said Ron fearfully.

"The pipes!" answered Hermione immediately. "Bet you it's moving around through the plumbing!"

"Oh, that's assuring. I guess that means all the toilets are basically death traps," said Ron. Then he looked at Harry. "So Dobby stopped you from getting on the train and broke your arm so you wouldn't have to face a Basilisk, eh?" He shook his head. "You know what, Harry? If he doesn't stop trying to save your life he's going to kill you."

Malfoy didn't show up in the library Sunday morning. So Harry, Ron, Hermione and Julia spent the afternoon looking up books that talked about Basilisks.

"Take a look at this," said Hermione, sliding a very old library book across their table. " ' *Spiders flee before the Basilisk, for it is their mortal enemy, and the Basilisk flees only from the crowing of the rooster, which is fatal to it* .' That explains why the spiders were acting so weird: they were trying to get away from the castle because they knew there was a Basilisk loose."

"Also explains why Hagrid was putting up rooster cages everywhere," said Ron. They'd seen Hagrid pulling a large trolley full of golden cages holding roosters after lunch. Hagrid was closed-mouthed on what he was doing, but his shifty behaviour told them it was something important he wasn't allowed to talk about.

"Looks like only a Parselmouth can control a Basilisk," said Julia, skimming through several open books in front of her. "So if Malfoy is the heir of Slytherin, then that means he's a Parselmouth."

"Figures Malfoy is a Parselmouth," said Ron with savage satisfaction. "Everyone knows that's a mark of a Dark wizard. You never hear of a decent one who could talk to snakes. They called Slytherin himself serpent-tongue."

Harry said nothing as his friends shared dark mutters. He never told anyone that *he* could talk to snakes, which he now knew was called Parselmouth and snake-language Parseltongue. Dumbledore had warned him against it on the very first day they met. Since it wasn't something that came up in a casual conversation, Harry never thought much about it - until now.

Parselmouth… a mark of a Dark wizard…

Could *he*, Harry, be the heir of Slytherin? The very first house the Sorting Hat wanted to put him in was Slytherin. The small voice at his ear had whispered: *You could be great you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on your way to greatness. There's no doubt about that.* But Harry had no desire to become a great man, so the Sorting Hat, after suggesting Hufflepuff as an alternative, put him in Gryffindor instead. Now that he knew more about Slytherin's dark reputation, Harry couldn't help but feel he had a very close shave. *But* . Could he be attacking people without even knowing it? Could this be the reason why the Sorting Hat told him it was an impossible business, being good? Not because being good in general was impossible, but because it was impossible for *Harry*, who was destined to become a Dark wizard no matter how hard he tried?

Oblivious to Harry's internal turmoil, Ron, Hermione and Julia kept on their discussion.

"The simplest way to find out whether Malfoy is a Parselmouth or not is making him *talk* to a snake," said Hermione matter-of-factly, as if it was as simple a matter as going to the shops to buy laundry detergent. "That means we need a snake for him to talk *to* ."

"I could ask Uncle Jason to get me one," said Julia. "He usually doesn't ask questions the more unusual the gift."

"Shouldn't it be the other way around?" asked Ron.

Julia shook her head. "He wants me to stop living a boring life, so he likes it when I do."

"No offence, but your Uncle sounds a bit mental," said Ron.

"Thank you, I'll give him your compliments," said Julia dryly.

"How long do you think it will take him to send one?" Hermione asked.

"Well, I'll have to make it sound like I want one for Christmas…" Julia began.

"Christmas?" said Ron. "Malfoy could have attacked half of the Muggle-borns in school by then!" But Hermione's eyes narrowed dangerously, so he added swiftly. "But it's the best plan we got, so full steam ahead, I say. What do you think, Harry?"

Harry forced himself to think about it. He could, of course, ask Sherlock for a pet snake and Sherlock would send him one immediately. But he didn't think it would be wise to get close to a snake. The day he talked to the Burmese Python in the London zoo, he didn't even realise he was speaking Parseltongue until John snatched him away from the glass display thinking he was having a seizure.

"Sounds like a plan," said Harry. "Speaking of, what are your Christmas holiday plans?"

Ron was telling them Mr. and Mrs. Weasley was planning on travelling to Egypt to visit his brother Bill when Professor McGonagall strode to their table.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Potter," she said briskly. "Please follow me. The headmaster wishes to speak to you."

"Why?" Harry asked nervously.

"There's no need to be nervous, Mr. Potter, you're not in trouble this time," assured Professor McGonagall, looking slightly amused. "He just wishes to ask you a few questions."

Harry slowly rose from his seat and followed after Professor McGonagall. On their way to the headmaster's office, presumably, he saw Justin Finch-Fletchley in the hall, heading his way. Harry raised his hand to wave hello, but Justin quickly avoided eye-contact and turned to a different direction. Harry continued to march after

Professor McGonagall, feeling bewildered and slightly hurt at Justin's behaviour.

Professor McGonagall marched around a corner, and stopped before a large and extremely ugly stone gargoyle.

"Sherbet Lemon!" she said. Evidently that was the password because the gargoyle suddenly sprang to life and hopped aside as the wall behind it split in two. Harry quickly forgot about his previous bewilderment and hurt and stood amazed. Behind the wall was a spiral staircase that was moving smoothly upward, like an escalator. As he and Professor McGonagall stepped onto it, Harry heard the wall thud closed behind them. They rose upwards in circles, higher and higher, until at last, slightly dizzy, Harry saw a gleaming oak door ahead, with a brass knocker in a shape of a griffin. They stepped off the stone staircase at the top, and Professor McGonagall rapped on the door. It opened silently and they entered. Professor McGonagall told Harry to wait and left him there, alone.

Harry looked around. One thing was certain: of all the teachers' offices he'd been to, Dumbledore's was by far the most interesting. It was a large and beautiful circular room, full of funny little noises. A number of curious silver instruments stood on spindle-legged tables, whirring and emitting little puffs of smoke. The walls were covered with portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses, all of whom were snoozing gently in their frames. There was also an enormous, claw-footed desk, and, sitting on a shelf behind it, a shabby tattered wizard's hat - the *Sorting Hat* .

Harry hesitated. Would it hurt to put on the Sorting Hat again, just to make sure- absolutely sure- that he was put in the right house? He hemmed and hawed over the thought as he watched the sleeping portraits.

The oak doors opened again, and Professor Flitwick and Ginny Weasley stepped inside.

"Just wait for Professor Dumbledore in here," squeaked Professor Flitwick before closing the door behind him.

Ginny stared at Harry like a deer cornered by a lorry with its high-

beams on. Harry shrugged his shoulders to show he had no idea why he was here either. Ginny nodded and slowly walked to join Harry in his wait.

They sat next to each other in a dreadfully awkward silence. Neither of them looked at each other.

"Did you get another cold?" asked Harry, after stealing a side-glance and noting Ginny was still very pale.

"No," said Ginny very quietly.

Harry nodded. "Okay."

They sat in another deeply awkward silence. Then they heard a gagging noise right behind them and turned around.

They weren't alone. Standing on a golden perch behind the door was a decrepit looking bird that resembled a half-plucked turkey. Harry stared at it and the bird looked balefully back, making its gagging noise. It looked very old and ill; both of its eyes were dull and, even as Harry watched, a couple more feathers fell off its tail.

Harry was thinking how he was going to explain himself if Dumbledore's pet bird died while he and Ginny were in the office with it, when the bird burst into flames.

Ginny screamed and Harry gasped in shock. Harry looked around in case there was a glass of water, but he didn't see one. In the meantime, the bird had become a fireball. Then it gave one last, loud shriek and next second there was nothing but a smouldering pile of ash on the floor.

The office door opened a third time. Dumbledore came in, looking very sombre.

"Professor," Harry gasped. "Your bird-we couldn't do anything-it just caught fire-"

To Harry's astonishment, Dumbledore smiled.

"About time, too," he said. "He's been looking dreadful for days. I've

telling him to get a move on."

He chuckled at Ginny and Harry's stunned faces.

"Fawkes is a Phoenix, Harry, Ginny. Phoenixes burst into flame when it is time for them to die and are reborn from the ashes. Watch him…"

They looked down in time to see a tiny, wrinkled newborn bird poke its head out of the ashes. It looked as ugly as the old one.

"It's a shame you had to see him on his burning day," said Dumbledore as he seated himself behind his desk. "He's really very handsome most of the time, wonderful gold and red plumage. Fascinating creatures, phoenixes: They can carry immensely heavy loads, their tears have healing powers, and they make *highly* faithful pets."

In his shock of seeing Fawkes, Harry had forgotten the reason why he was in Dumbledore office, which didn't mean anything because he didn't have a clue since the beginning. He watched nervously as Dumbledore settled into his high chair and nailed Harry with his light-blue, penetrating stare. Harry had a feeling his mind was being scanned.

"I want to assure both of you that I don't think you are responsible for the attacks," said Dumbledore calmly, his fingertip touching. "However, I do wish to speak to you. Harry, do you have anything to tell me? Anything at all?"

Harry pondered the open-ended question. What should he tell Dumbledore? That he thought he could be the heir of Slytherin? That he could be attacking people with a Basilisk without even knowing it, the same way he could never tell if he was speaking Parseltongue? That he feared he was destined to become a dark wizard regardless of his intentions? That even if he was manipulated and obliviated afterwards, there was no way he could tell because, unlike Sherlock, *his* mind resembled a memory hut where everything was thrown in haphazardly?

"No," said Harry. "There's nothing, Professor…"

Dumbledore held on to his gaze for several heartbeats before moving on to Ginny.

"And you, Ginny? Anything you want me to know? Has anything odd happened to you?"

Ginny stared at Dumbledore for a moment before putting her head down, letting out a tiny, barely audible no. Harry had a feeling her no was the same no he just gave.

Harry left with Ginny shortly after this. He wasn't sure if he felt more assured or troubled, and the shadowed look on Ginny's face told him she felt the same.

By Monday morning the news that Colin Creevey had been attacked and was now lying as though dead in the Hospital Wing had spread through the entire school. The air in the Great Hall was thick with rumour and suspicion. All the first-years huddled together in tightly-knit groups at their respective house tables, as through something terrible would happen if they separated. Ginny, who sat next to Colin in Charms, was especially distraught, but Harry thought Fred and George were going the wrong way to cheer her up. They kept tapping her shoulder so she could look up and see them covered in different kinds of hair and boils until Percy, apoplectic with rage, told them he was going to write to Mrs. Weasley.

Harry was staring at his cooling porridge without any appetite when someone cleared his throat.

"Um…" said a first year boy whose name Harry didn't know, looking very nervous. "D'you… do you know anything about…?"

He trailed off, unable to continue. Harry wondered if he should say something or anything as he searched all of the first years' faces. They all looked earnest and fearful, and one of the girls, a Muggle-born if he remembered correctly, looked like she was about to cry.

"I know *how* the attacks are happening," said Harry carefully, uncertain how much he should say. "I just don't know *who."*

"Do you know how we can protect ourselves?" asked a first-year girl (not the Muggle-born; name unknown).

"Uh, yeah," said Harry. "Did you see the roosters in the halls?"

The first-years nodded uncertainly.

"As long as you can hear one of those roosters crowing, you're okay," said Harry.

The first-years were staring at each other in bewilderment and awe as hundreds of owls flew into the Great Hall, bearing the morning mail. Harry spotted Hedwig among the browns and greys. Instead of stopping at the Gryffindor table, his snowy owl flew all the way to the head table where the teachers were sitting. Harry wasn't sure how to react when Hedwig dropped the red envelope in her beak on top of Lockhart's head.

Ron gasped and pointed. "That's-"

"What is it?" asked Harry, as he watched Hedwig sail through the air and land neatly next to his porridge bowl. "Hey there, thought you were ignoring me for second."

Hedwig nipped his finger affectionately. Meanwhile, Ron and Neville were staring at the red envelope as though they expected it to explode. Lockhart stared as though he expected the same, and without his usual cheeky smile, he looked feeble and weak-chinned. All the other teachers were pointedly not looking at him.

"What's going on?" asked Harry.

"He-someone sent Lockhart a Howler," said Ron faintly.

Harry looked at Ron's awed face to the red envelope. A lot of people joined him in his staring.

"What's a Howler?" he said.

But Ron's whole attention was fixed on the letter, which was starting to smoke at the edges.

"He needs to open it soon," said Neville in a timid whisper. "It'll be worse if he doesn't. My gran sent me one once, and I ignored it, and-" he gulped- "it was horrible."

Snape, who was sitting two seats down to Lockhart, made a curt comment holding a peculiar expression: like he was trying very hard not to smile. Lockhart stretched out a trembling hand and slit the envelope open. Neville and Ron stuffed their fingers in their ears. A split second later, Harry knew why. Oh boy, did he know why:

"-HOW THE… FECK DID YOU EVEN MANAGE TO REMOVE HARRY'S BONES, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CAN STILL FAFF AROUND CALLING YOURSELF A WIZARD, DIDN'T THEY TEACH YOU STAY THE… FECK OUT OF THE WAY UNTIL PROPER MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS TAKES CARE OF INJURIES YOU STUNTED, HALF-WITTED- NO, THAT'S A COMPLIMENT, I TAKE IT BACK, YOU COMPLETELY WITLESS-"

John's yells, a hundred times louder than usual, shook dust from the ceiling, rattled the spoons and plates on the tables, and echoed deafeningly off the walls. People all around the hall were swivelling to see who had received the Howler. Lockhart ducked underneath the table and refused to come out.

"- *COULDN'T BELIEVE IT WHEN I HEARD THE NEWS… LOCKHART, YOU FARKING EFF-BUCKET, DON'T YOU REALISE YOU HAVE TO AMPUTATE ARMS THAT DON'T HAVE BONES? WHAT THE F-… WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO DO IF NO ONE COULD…* ARGH! *I CAN'T DO THIS! SHERLOCK, TAKE OVER!*"

Harry was wondering how long John was going to last without resorting to angry army personnel speak. He listened, ears throbbing, as Sherlock's voice at his most menacing filled the halls.

"- *I'M ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTED, LOCKHART! EVEN ANDERSON AT HIS WORST DIDN'T MANAGE THIS KIND OF STUDPITY! TALKING ABOUT WAGGA WAGGA WEREWOLF IN FINLAND WHEN IT RIGHTFULLY SHOULD BE AUSTRALIA, CLAIMING TO TREAT A YETI ON THE SAME SUMMER YOU SUPPOSEDLY ENCOUNTERED A VAMPIRE IN A DIFFERENT CONTINENT, HOW DID YOU EVEN* THINK *THIS KIND OF*

ABSURD TIMELINE CAN WORK WITH YOUR SUBSTANDARD MAGIC ABILITIES, I WOULD'VE BEEN SURPRISED HAD I NOT KNOWN YOUR BRAIN IS A MERE FARCE AND DOESN'T ACTUALLY EXIST*…* !"

Sherlock went on for several minutes, ripping every story written by Lockhart to shreds with the vitriol he reserved for people like Mr. Anderson and Sergeant Donovan. Then the envelope curled up and burst into flames, leaving a ringing silence in its wake. Lockhart emerged from underneath the table looking completely ashen, as though a tidal wave had just passed over him and the effects hadn't hit him fully yet. A few people laughed, clapped even, and gradually a babble of talk broke out again.

Ron turned his face back to the Gryffindor table.

"I figured they'd be angry, but I never thought they'd do *this*," he said, looking stunned, "Did John really say F-bu…"

" *Don't say it*," hissed Hermione, looking completely mortified.

Harry pushed his porridge closer and started eating. His insides were light and buoyant. He should've known John and Sherlock would get through eventually.

Final Notes : Sherlock and John heavy chapter to compensate the dearth of their presence for two chapters.

I wondered why Hermione didn't just look up Basilisk from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* in Canon until I realised FB doesn't mention the Basilisk flees from the crowing of the rooster. Heh. The things you notice when you're writing fanfic…

John is trying not to swear anymore. It's very hard, as you can tell.

Unliving Memory

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forward and backward to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Five: Unliving Memory

Since Sherlock and John's Howler, many students started to examine Lockhart's books more closely. Terry confided to Harry after Sunday Chapel that several Ravenclaw upperclassmen started demanding Lockhart to provide further evidence of his travels. Harry himself noted many of his fellow Gryffindors started skipping Defence Against the Dark Arts as they started to see the inconsistencies Sherlock had pointed out. Lockhart took this as well as expected; the ashen face from the fateful Monday morning hardly left him, and he was rarely seen out and about.

"I supposed he had it coming, considering," said Terry uneasily. "But the way it happened was very bad."

Harry, whose first instinct to Sherlock's non-crime related deductions was to cringe, didn't feel sorry at all. " *Is* there a nice way it could've happened?" he argued.

Terry sighed. "… No."

They didn't discuss the matter after that. Harry had more pressing things to worry about. Many of the first years, and not just the Gryffindor ones, started following him around in the hallways

between classes, as though they were convinced staying close to Harry would protect them from an attack. Hidden from the teachers, a roaring trade in talismans, amulets, and other protective devices was sweeping the school. Neville Longbottom bought a large, evil-smelling green onion, a pointed purple crystal, and a rotting newt tail before Harry could tell him those items would not deter Slytherin's Monster and the other Gryffindor boys pointed out that he was in no danger either way; he was a pure-blood, and therefore unlikely to be attacked.

"They went for Filch first," said Neville, his round face fearful. "And everyone knows I'm almost a Squib."

Julia was still waiting on her Uncle Jason to respond to her request for a snake ("I told him it's for an experiment," she said). Unfortunately, Mr. Jason was doing a lot of transcontinental travelling this year, Apparating to and from a dozen different countries across the globe, which meant they couldn't test their Malfoy the Parselmouth theory until he stayed in one place long enough for an owl to find him. They also didn't know how to find more information on the last time the Chamber of Secrets had been opened. Both seemed to hinge on questioning Malfoy, but Malfoy was far more interested in strutting around enjoying the atmosphere of fear than visiting the library to have a word with Julia (she point-blank refused to talk to him first, an attitude Ron approved of). So they tried to think of alternatives.

No one thought of a way until three weeks before the Christmas holidays. Ron and Harry were working on their History of Magic homework in the library on the Wednesday of that week. Professor Binns had asked for *another* three-foot long composition, this time on the formation of the International Confederation of Wizards.

"I don't believe it, I'm still eight inches short…" said Ron furiously, letting go of his parchment, which sprang back into a roll. "And Hermione's done four feet and two inches and her writing's *tiny* ."

"Where is she?" asked Harry, taking the tape-measure and unrolling his own homework.

"Over there somewhere," said Ron, waving at the row of

bookshelves, "Probably looking for another book. I reckon she'll end up reading the whole library before Christmas."

Harry sighed in relief when he confirmed his own essay was exactly three feet. Then a thought occurred to him.

"How does Binns *read* these essays? He can't actually pick them up since he's a ghost."

"Who knows?" said Ron, scribbling away, making his writing as large as possible. "Maybe he doesn't-it's not like he notices when we're asleep in class."

"That means it doesn't matter if we actually turn in a *written* essay," said Harry, taking the thought to its logical conclusion. "Just submit a three feet long blank roll of parchment with your name on it, and you're set."

Ron paused to look up and stare incredulously at Harry, like the thought hadn't occurred to him either. That moment Hermione emerged from the bookshelves, looking irritable.

" *Nothing*," she said, sitting down next to Ron and Harry. "There's nothing in the old editions of the *Daily Prophet* that mention the Chamber of Secrets or mysterious attacks happening in Hogwarts. You'd think it would've made it to the news, and I reviewed every edition from twenty to thirty years prior."

"That's the time period Lucius Malfoy was in school?" asked Harry quickly.

"Probably; he has to be around his forties," said Hermione, biting her lip. "But I couldn't find anything…"

Ron threw his quill down. "That's it, I'm done."

"No, you're not," said Hermione as she measured Ron's homework. "You still have about two inches to go."

"Who cares? Binns is a ghost, it's not like he can unroll the parchment even if he wanted to…"

Hermione opened her mouth to tell him off, but a sudden transformation took over her. Ron and Harry stared at her, mystified, as she clapped a hand to her forehead.

"That's it! I can't believe it didn't occur to me earlier!"

"What are you on about?" asked Ron.

"The ghosts!" said Hermione excitedly. "A lot of them have been around here for hundreds of years-maybe even to the time Hogwarts was founded! We could ask them about the Chamber of Secrets and the last time it was open!"

Harry and Ron were ready to burst into excitement, too, when the bell rang. The three of them reluctantly rose and headed to the History of Magic.

It was as boring as ever that day. Professor Binns opened his ghostly notes and began to read in a flat drone like an old vacuum cleaner until nearly everyone in the class was in a deep stupor, occasionally coming to long enough to copy down a name or date, then falling asleep again. Ron and Harry focused on writing down all of the ghosts they knew of. Even Hermione didn't take her usual notes and joined their silent discussion. They all agreed Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost of Gryffindor Tower, was the first one to go to.

Harry, Ron and Hermione fought their way against the tide of students to find Nearly Headless Nick. They found him in a deserted corridor staring morosely out of a window, muttering under his breath, "… *still* don't fulfil their requirements… half an inch, if that…"

"Hello, Nick," said Harry.

"Hello, hello," said Nearly Headless Nick, starting and looking round. He wore a dashing, plumed hat on his long curly hair, and a tunic with a ruff, which concealed the fact that his neck was almost completely severed. He was pale as smoke, and Harry could see right through him to gray-cast sky that promised snow.

"You all look troubled, young Gryffindors," said Nick, folding a

transparent letter as he spoke and tucking it inside his doublet.

"So do you," said Harry.

"Ah," Nearly Headless Nick waved an elegant hand, "a matter of no importance… It's not as though I really wanted to join… Thought I'd apply again, after the change in leadership since my five hundredth Deathday, but apparently I still 'don't fulfil requirements'-"

In spite of his airy tone, there was a look of great bitterness on his face.

"But you would think, wouldn't you," he erupted suddenly, pulling the letter back out of his pocket, "that getting hit forty-five times in the neck with a blunt axe would qualify you to join the Headless Hunt?"

"Oh - yes," said Hermione, quickly.

"I mean, nobody wishes more than I do that it had all been quick and clean, and my head had come off properly, I mean, it would have saved me a great deal of pain and ridicule. However-" Nearly Headless Nick shook his letter open and read furiously:

" *We can only accept huntsmen whose heads have parted company with their bodies. You will appreciate that it would be impossible otherwise for members to participate in hunt activities such as Horseback Head-Juggling and Head Polo. It is with the greatest regret, therefore, that I must inform you that you do not fulfil our requirements. With very best wishes, Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore.* "

Fuming, Nearly Headless Nick stuffed the letter away.

"Half an inch of skin and sinew holding my neck on! Most people would think that's good and beheaded, but oh, no, it's not enough for Sir Properly Decapitated-Podmore."

Nearly Headless Nick took several deep breaths and then said, in a far calmer tone, "So-what's bothering you? Anything I can do?"

"We were wondering if you remember the last time Hogwarts was being attacked by some unknown monster," said Harry. "You know,

like the way Mrs. Norris and Colin were attacked."

"Ah," said Nick, looking alert. "Of course you three would have the sense to ask a ghost. Not many do, you know."

"So you *do* know?" asked Ron eagerly.

"As matter of fact, yes," said Nick, drawing himself up and looking dignified. "I experienced much of Hogwarts' history since my death five hundred and twenty years ago. The last time the Chamber of Secrets was reputedly open and the Heir of Slytherin unleashed the monster within was *seventy* years ago. Like now, students were being attacked-and sadly, one student actually *died* ."

Hermione gasped, stricken. Ron, however, looked very disappointed and Harry knew why: if the previous attacks happened *seventy* years ago, it was long before Lucius Malfoy's time.

"Do you know if the person who opened the Chamber was caught?" asked Harry.

"The accused person was expelled, I know that much," said Nick.

"Who was it?" asked Hermione.

"I can't say," said Nick delicately. "But the attacks ended immediately afterwards. Now if that is all-"

Nearly Headless Nick shooed them off to dinner and glided into a wall. Harry, Ron and Hermione trudged down to the Great Hall, talking in hushed whispers.

"It doesn't have to be *Lucius* Malfoy," Ron said stubbornly. "It could've been Draco's grandfather!"

"Maybe," said Harry. "I wish we asked Nick *how* the Basilisk was caught the first time, might've given us a clue."

"Or *who* caught it," said Hermione. "Well, we'll ask that to the next ghost we can get hold of."

They were almost halfway there when an angry outburst from the

floor below reached their ears.

"That's Filch," Harry muttered as they hurried down the stairs and paused, out of sight, listening hard.

"You don't think someone else's been attacked?" said Ron tensely.

They stood still, their heads inclined toward Filch's voice, which sounded quite hysterical.

"… *even more work for me! Mopping all night, like I haven't got enough to do! No, this is the final straw, I'm going to Dumbledore* -"

His footsteps receded along the out-of-sight corridor and they heard a distant door slam.

They poked their heads around the corner. Filch had clearly been manning his usual lookout post: They were once again on the spot where Mrs. Norris had been attacked. They saw at a glance what Filch had been shouting about. A great flood of water stretched over half the corridor and it looked as though it was still seeping from under the door of Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. Now that Filch had stopped shouting, they could hear Myrtle's wails echoing off the bathroom walls.

"Now what's up with her?" said Ron.

"Let's go and see," said Harry, and holding their robes over their ankles they stepped through the great wash of water to the door bearing it's OUT OF ORDER sign, ignored it as usual, and entered.

Moaning Myrtle was crying, if possible, louder and harder than ever before. She seemed to be hiding down her usual toilet. It was dark in the bathroom because the candles had been extinguished in the great rush of water that had left both walls and floor soaking wet.

"What's up, Myrtle?" said Harry.

"Who's that?" glugged Myrtle miserably. "Come to throw something else at me?"

Harry waded across to her stall and said, "Why would I throw

something at you?"

"Don't ask me!" Myrtle shouted, emerging with a wave of yet more water, which splashed onto the already sopping floor. "Here I am, minding my own business, and someone thinks it's funny to throw a book at me…"

"But it can't hurt you if someone throws something at you," said Harry, reasonably. "I mean, it'd just go right through you, wouldn't it?"

He had said the wrong thing. Myrtle puffed herself up and shrieked, "Let's all throw books at Myrtle, because she can't feel it! Ten points if you can get it through her stomach! Fifty points if it goes through her head! Well, ha, ha, ha! What a lovely game, I don't think!"

"Who threw it at you, anyway?" asked Hermione.

"I don't *know*… I was just sitting in the U-bend, thinking about death, and it fell right through the top of my head," said Myrtle, glaring at them. "It got washed out… the person who cries with me sometimes took it."

"Who?"

"Why do you care!" howled Myrtle, rounding on them. "Some people just want to cry in private! Just leave us alone, you're just gonna talk about it behind our backs, anyway! D'you think I don't know what people call *me* behind my back? Fat Myrtle! Ugly Myrtle! Miserable, moaning, moping Myrtle!"

There was no point trying to get more information out of her in this state. The three of them shrugged their shoulders and left Myrtle to cry in peace.

A week passed, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione made very little progress in interviewing the ghosts of Hogwarts. Ghosts, they quickly discovered, weren't very communicative, especially to students who didn't belong to their old house. There were a lot of them too, ranging from the silent and morose Bloody Baron and the

cheerful Fat Friar (Peeves didn't count). Those who *were* willing to talk didn't give more information than Nearly Headless Nick. Those who *weren't* sometimes rather intentionally glided through them, which was unfortunate because it was like stepping through an icy shower. Harry asked Terry if he could pry some information out of the Grey Lady, the Ravenclaw ghost, and Julia volunteered to ask the Fat Friar, the Hufflepuff ghost.

They eventually discovered the name of the person who banished the Monster of Slytherin the last time.

"Tom Riddle?" said Harry, when Julia met them in the Music Room, which they'd designated as their point of contact. "Wait, I know that name. *T.M.* Riddle got an award for special services to the school seventy years ago."

"How on earth do you know that?" said Hermione in amazement.

"Because Filch made me polish his shield about ten times in detention back in October," said Harry wearily. "If you'd buff up a name for half an hour, you'd remember it, too. Well, you can see it for yourself in the trophy room."

They made a short trip to trophy room to examine Riddle's special award. Riddle's burnished gold shield was tucked away in a corner cabinet. It didn't carry details of why it had been given to him ("Good thing, too, or it'd be even bigger and you'd still be polishing it, Harry," said Ron), but the dates made the reason clear. They also found Riddle's name on an old Medal for Magical Merit, and on a list of old Head Boys.

"He sounds like Percy," said Ron, wrinkling his nose in disgust. "Prefect, Head Boy, probably top of every class-"

"You say that like it's a bad thing," said Hermione in a slightly hurt voice.

"But speaking of Prefects," said Julia. "I think I found Malfoy's grandfather's name."

They stared. Sure enough, there was an Abraxas Malfoy listed as

the Slytherin Prefect around the time the Chamber of Secrets was open the previous time, about two years after Tom Riddle became one.

"Abraxas Malfoy, the name rings a bell," said Hermione.

"I heard about him," said Ron darkly. "He was part of a plot that forced the first Muggle-born Minister of Magic to leave his post early. Nothing was proved against him, though. Slipperiness definitely runs in the family, eh?"

"I don't think he was expelled," said Julia, frowning. "Riddle caught the culprit when he was in *sixth* year, since he became Head Boy the year after he received the special services award. If Abraxas Malfoy was named Prefect two years *after* Riddle was appointed Slytherin Prefect, then," she bit her lip, "Abraxas Malfoy can't be the one accused. He was still in school to be *Prefect* after the incident."

"Maybe Riddle caught the wrong person?" said Ron. "Both of them were Slytherin, they might've plotted together and framed someone else."

"You're very set about the idea that it's Malfoy," said Julia mildly.

"Well, who else could it be?" said Ron.

Julia shrugged. Harry had a thought perhaps Ron *wanted* it be Malfoy more than he actually *thought* it was Malfoy, and he understood that. He was going to feel disappointed, too, when/if the Heir of Slytherin proved not to be Malfoy. The way evidence was stacking up against their theory on each turn, Harry had a feeling that it might.

The four of them headed to the library afterwards, to find anything on Malfoy and his family as they had for the past week. As Harry gloomily riffled through the indexes, he once again longed for a magical Google. Surely one of the smarter Muggle-borns would've figured out how to do it? How did Google work, anyway? Whoever came up with it, and it was probably a group of them, they were bloody geniuses.

Harry joined Ron, Hermione and Julia at their table.

"This one is about the origins of all the prominent pure-blood Wizarding families in Britain," said Hermione, pouring over a tattered, old book. "Not sure how the authors are determining which families as 'prominent'- oh, I see, families dating back to the Middle-ages, making contributions to the Wizarding world since then. But it's more about how long they've been around. Humph. Let's see if the Malfoy family is listed…"

It was. According to the book, Armand Malfoy was a French wizard and the first Malfoy to settle in Britain. He came to Britain along with the Norman invasion, and presumably gained the friendship of William the Conqueror around this time. After William was made King around 1066, Armand provided various services to the King (mostly shady in nature) as the court wizard. In exchange for these services, King William granted Armand a prime price of land in Wiltshire, seizing the property from the former landholders. The Malfoys had been residing there ever since.

"Most of the prominent pure-blood wizarding families in this book have similar histories," Hermione remarked. "It's the eleventh century, so Wizards and Muggles were still living together. I guess that means the Malfoys were around long enough to have married Slytherin's female descendants before they died out."

"Doesn't say so in the book, but Armand Malfoy was probably one of the foot soldiers," said Harry.

"Of course he was," snorted Julia. "Go back far enough, and everyone is just another bloody peasant."

Ron laughed. "Now that's a thought; Malfoy, the bloody stupid peasant…"

"And let's not forget he was dependent on a *Muggle* King," said Hermione with relish.

They skimmed through the whole book. They didn't find anything on Slytherin's descendants and their relations to the Malfoy family. But Ron said most old wizarding families were related to each other in

one way or another, so perhaps it was something that went without saying. Ron ran commentary on the names he recognised, most of which weren't very nice: Blacks, Avarys, Notts, Lestranges…

"Lestrange?" Julia repeated. "The Lestranges are a pure-blood family?"

"One of the oldest families out there. Why?"

Julia scratched her temple. "It's probably nothing. Just had a thought…"

"Spit it out," said Ron.

"Well…" said Julia. "Daddy told me he changed his name from Lestrange to Lestrade when he married my Mum."

Harry, Ron and Hermione gaped at her. Julia shrugged.

"Doesn't have to mean anything," she said dismissively. "There are Lestranges in the Muggle World, too, and lots and lots of Blacks. It's one of the most common last names in Great Britain."

"Are you the only one who has magic in your immediate family?" asked Hermione.

"I think so," said Julia. "Though, now that I think about it, Martin might've caused it to snow on Daddy when he had a fever, but that could've been me."

"Maybe your Dad's a squib," Ron suggested. "Most Squibs live in the Muggle world since they don't have magic."

Julia's expression turned pensive, but she didn't say anything.

They returned to the Music Room and drew a noise-cancelling screen around themselves to update Sherlock.

"Questioning the ghosts was a good idea," said Sherlock in approval, which made them feel very pleased. "Identifying Draco Malfoy's grandfather and the year he was at school, also good. You only failed to ask the ghosts who the *victims* of the previous attacks

were."

"Is that important?" asked Ron.

"Well, yeah," said John. "We could contact them and ask what they remember about their attacks."

The four of them took time to smack themselves for not thinking that. There was *always* something.

"What else do we need to find out?" asked Harry. "And what should we be doing?"

"First, review the events so far," said Sherlock. "Harry, you received a warning from Dobby, a house-elf. He had access to information that an attack was to occur in Hogwarts. He is under enchantment that disallows him from telling you exactly who and what, but it doesn't stop him visiting and giving you a warning. And he has done so, twice, at his own risk. Conclusion: Dobby, however misguided, is on your side, unlike the plotters, who in the balance of probably are Dobby's masters."

They nodded.

"House-elves reside in large residences such as manors and castles," Sherlock continued. "Dobby said that he belongs to a wizard family-a rich one, since they own a manor house, at the very least. The attacks themselves are rooted in the pure-blood superiority agenda of Slytherin. What then can you expect from the plotter of the attacks?"

"To be from an old, wealthy wizard family that adheres to the pure-blood agenda," said Hermione promptly.

"Someone like *Malfoy*," Ron added.

"Yes, someone *like* Malfoy. You're making the correct distinction," said Sherlock ironically. "The plotter also has access to Hogwarts. But how much access to Hogwarts does the plotter need to orchestrate the attacks? This leads to the question of how the attacks are being orchestrated: is it directed by the plotter, or is there an agent working *for* the plotter, who only planted the agent?

There are too many variables on this. But the fact a Basilisk is being used, narrows down the scope considerably: *the one leading the attacks must have the ability to talk to snakes* ."

"But we know that already," said Ron. "That's why we've been waiting for Julia's uncle to send us a snake so we can check if any of the students here can speak Parseltongue."

"Oh, for God's sake!" growled Sherlock. "Are you a magical or not? Can't you just *conjure* a snake with magic? *!* "

They gaped at each other before ducking their heads in shame. How did they not realize this?

" *Now* do you know what do?" asked Sherlock, sounding deeply aggravated.

"Find the victims of the last Basilisk attack, look up a spell that will let us conjure a snake, and check if anyone who fits the description of the attacker can speak to snakes," Hermione answered.

"And find the right opportunity to do it," said John. "Randomly flinging snakes at people is just not on."

"Why not?" Sherlock asked, as if there was nothing wrong with flinging snakes at people for the sake of a case.

John sighed. "We want to find out who did this, not make people suspect Harry and his friends are responsible."

"Why would anyone think that?"

"Because most of the students are teenagers who haven't learned how to *think*," explained John patiently. "Now go on. Look it up. Harry, I'll text you later."

John texted later that night as promised, after all of the boys in Harry's dormitory fell asleep.

I know you're still worried about the London Zoo incident. DTL

Harry worried his lower lip as he replied back: *Do you think I'm…?*

No. We know it's not you. DTL; DPR

But someone can be making me :(Can't tell if I have a gap in my memory, Harry paused, and added, *I'm not Sherlock.*

No. You're a wizard, and a very good one at that. You can find a way to stop people from erasing our memories.

Harry's eyes went wide. *Like a protective shield?*

Yes. Look it up while you're searching for the snake spell. btw, make sure you don't speak to any. DTL

Harry went under the covers after deleting all of John's texts marked DTL (delete this later) and all of his replies John marked as DPR (delete previous reply), and reading the final notes:

You're in the wellspring of magical knowledge. Use your opportunities well. SH

You can do it. I know you can. Just be careful.

It took them less than two days to find a spell that would conjure a snake. Julia found a jinx called *Serpensortia* in *Curses and Countercurses (Bewitch Your Friends and Befuddle Your Enemies with the Latest Revenges: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs, Tongue-Tying and Much, Much More)* by Professor Vindictus Viridian that fit the bill perfectly. The next step was learning the curse.

"I don't think I should risk it," said Ron. "Not with my wand like this."

That moment, his cracked and spellotaped wand started whistling loudly. Julia just whipped around her wand, which stayed stubbornly silent and unresponsive no matter what she did. Thus Hermione and Harry worked on learning the jinx. Hermione took the precaution of learning the counter-jinx first, and Harry was careful not to look at the resulting snake. Within a day, Hermione and Harry mastered both the jinx and the counter-jinx. So they directed their attention to plotting ways to use the jinx on Malfoy. The trick was to surprise him into speaking Parseltongue without any of them getting caught. This

was a lot more difficult than they initially imagined-Malfoy was always flanked by his two baits-for-brains friends, Crabbe and Goyle, and often in the company of other Slytherin students.

Harry found an opportunity the week before Christmas Holidays from an unexpected venue. Harry, Ron and Hermione had just returned to the Gryffindor Common Room after another long afternoon of plotting and practicing in the Music Room, when Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas beckoned them over, looking excited.

"They're starting a Duelling Club!" said Seamus, "First meeting tonight at eight o clock! I wouldn't mind duelling lessons; they might come in handy one of these days…"

"Like how?" said Ron, but he still looked interested.

"Could be useful," he said to Harry and Hermione as they settled at an empty table. "Shall we go?"

Harry and Hermione were all for it, so at eight o'clock that evening they hurried to the Great Hall. The long dining tables had vanished and a golden stage had appeared along one wall, lit by thousands of candles floating overhead. The ceiling was velvety black once more and most of the school seemed to be packed beneath it, all carrying their wands and looking excited.

"I wonder who'll be teaching us?" said Hermione as they edged into the chattering crowd. "Someone told me Flitwick was a duelling champion when he was young- maybe it'll be him."

"As long as it's not-" Harry began, but he ended on a groan: Gilderoy Lockhart was walking onto the stage, looking a bit paler than usual, but resplendent in robes of deep plum and accompanied by none other than Snape, wearing his usual black.

Lockhart waved an arm for silence and called "Gather round, gather round! Can everyone see me? Can you all hear me? Excellent!

"Now, Professor Dumbledore has granted me permission to start this little duelling club, to train you all in case you ever need to

defend yourselves as I myself have done on countless occasions-for full details, see my published works."

"Someone looks like he regained his ego," Harry muttered as he watched Lockhart flash a wide smile.

"Let me introduce my assistant, Professor Snape," said Lockhart. "He tells me he knows a little bit about duelling himself and has sportingly agreed to help me with a short demonstration before we begin. Now, I don't want any of you youngsters to worry - you'll still have your Potions master when I'm through with him, never fear!"

"Wouldn't it be good if they finished each other off?" Ron muttered in Harry's ear.

Snape's upper lip was curling. Harry wondered why Lockhart was still smiling; if Snape had been looking at him like that he'd have been running as fast as he could in the opposite direction.

Lockhart and Snape turned to face each other and bowed; at least, Lockhart did, with much twirling of his hands, whereas Snape jerked his head irritably. Then they raised their wands like swords in front of them.

"As you see, we are holding our wands in the accepted combative position," Lockhart told the silent crowd. "On the count of three, we will cast our first spells. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course."

"I wouldn't bet on that," Harry murmured, watching Snape baring his teeth.

"One-two-three-"

Both of them swung their wands above their heads and pointed them at their opponent; Snape cried: "Expelliarmus!" There was a dazzling flash of scarlet light and Lockhart was blasted off his feet: He flew backward off the stage, smashed into the wall, and slid down it to sprawl on the floor.

Malfoy and some of the other Slytherins cheered. Hermione was dancing on tiptoes. "Do you think he's all right?" she squealed through her fingers.

"Who cares?" said Harry and Ron together.

Lockhart was getting unsteadily to his feet. His hat had fallen off and his wavy hair was standing on end.

"Well, there you have it!" he said, tottering back onto the platform. "That was a Disarming Charm - as you see, I've lost my wand - ah, thank you, Miss Brown-yes, an excellent idea to show them that, Professor Snape, but if you don't mind my saying so, it was very obvious what you were about to do. If I had wanted to stop you it would have been only too easy-however, I felt it would be instructive to let them see…"

Snape was looking murderous. Possibly Lockhart had noticed, because he said, "Enough demonstrating! I'm going to come amongst you now and put you all into pairs. Professor Snape, if you'd like to help me-"

They moved through the crowd, matching up partners. Lockhart teamed Neville with Justin Finch-Fletchley, but Snape reached Harry and Ron first.

"Time to split up the dream team and its cohorts, I think," he sneered. "Weasley, you can partner Finnigan. Potter-"

Harry moved automatically toward Hermione.

"I don't think so," said Snape, smiling coldly. "Mr. Malfoy, come over here. Let's see what you make of the famous Potter. Miss Lestrade, you can partner Miss Parkinson. And you, Miss Granger-you can partner Miss Bulstrode."

Malfoy strutted over, smirking. Behind him walked Pansy Parkinson and a Slytherin girl who reminded Harry of a picture he'd seen in Holidays with Hags. She was large and square and her heavy jaw jutted aggressively. Hermione gave her a weak smile that she did not return. Pansy flashed a vicious smile on her pug-like face, and Julia kept her expression resolutely blank.

"Face your partners!" called Lockhart, back on the platform. "And bow!"

Harry and Malfoy barely inclined their heads, not taking their eyes off each other.

"Wands at the ready!" shouted Lockhart. "When I count to three, cast your charms to disarm your opponents - only to disarm them - we don't want any accidents - one… two… three-"

Harry swung his wand high, but Malfoy had already started on "two": His spell hit Harry so hard he felt as though he'd been hit over the head with a saucepan. He stumbled, but everything still seemed to be working, so wasting no more time, Harry pointed his wand straight at Malfoy and shouted: " *Expelliarmus, Rictusempra* !"

A jet of scarlet light quickly followed by silver one hit Malfoy in the stomach. Malfoy's wand flew out of his hand and Malfoy doubled up, wheezing.

"I said disarm only!" Lockhart shouted in alarm over the heads of the battling crowd, as Malfoy sank to his knees and Harry caught his wand; Harry had hit him with the Disarming Spell and the Tickling Charm, so Malfoy was wandless and could barely move for laughing. Harry hung back, feeling grimly satisfied; John had taught him he should always have two successive attacks in mind when engaged in a fight, and the advice hadn't failed him once.

"Stop! Stop!" screamed Lockhart, but Snape took charge. "Finite Incantatem!" he shouted.

A haze of greenish smoke was hovering over the scene. Both Neville and Justin were lying on the floor, panting; Ron was holding up an ashen-faced Seamus, apologizing for whatever his broken wand had done; Julia appeared not to have bothered using her wand, but she still managed to leave Pansy sprawled on the floor on her back with all the wind knocked out of her; Hermione and Millicent Bulstrode were still moving- Millicent had Hermione in a headlock and Hermione was whimpering in pain, and both their wands lay forgotten on the floor. Harry leapt forward and pulled Millicent off. It was difficult: She was a lot bigger than he was.

"Dear, dear," said Lockhart, skittering through the crowd, looking at the aftermath of the duels. "Up you go, Macmillan… Careful there,

Miss Fawcett… Pinch it hard, it'll stop bleeding in a second.

"I think I'd better teach you how to block unfriendly spells," said Lockhart, standing flustered in the midst of the hall. He glanced at Snape, whose black eyes glinted, and looked quickly away. "Let's have a volunteer pair- Longbottom and Finch-Fletchley, how about you-"

"A bad idea, Professor Lockhart," said Snape, gliding over like a large and malevolent bat. "Longbottom causes devastation with the simplest spells. We'll be sending what's left of Finch-Fletchley up to the hospital wing in a box." Neville's round, pink face went pinker. "How about Malfoy and Potter?" Snape said with a twisted smile.

"Excellent idea!" said Lockhart, gesturing Harry and Malfoy into the middle of the hall as the crowd backed away to give them room.

"Now, Harry," said Lockhart. "When Draco points his wand at you, you do this."

He raised his own wand, attempted a complicated sort of wiggling action, and dropped it. Snape smirked as Lockhart quickly picked it up, saying, "Whoops-my wand is a little overexcited-"

Harry wasn't sure what else he was expecting, so he sighed. Meanwhile, Snape moved closer to Malfoy, bent down, and whispered something in his ear that made Malfoy smirk.

"Scared?" muttered Malfoy, so that Lockhart couldn't hear him.

"You wish," said Harry out of the corner of his mouth.

Lockhart cuffed Harry merrily on the shoulder. "Just do what I did, Harry!"

Harry stared at him. "What, drop my wand?"

But Lockhart wasn't listening.

"Three - two - one - go!" he shouted.

Malfoy raised his wand quickly and bellowed, " *Serpensortia* !"

The end of his wand exploded. Harry watched, aghast, as a long black snake shot out of it, fell heavily onto the floor between them, and raised itself, ready to strike. There were screams as the crowd backed swiftly away, clearing the floor.

"Don't move, Potter," said Snape lazily, clearly enjoying the sight of Harry standing motionless, eye to eye with an angry snake. "I'll get rid of it…"

"Allow me!" shouted Lockhart, but Harry was ahead of both of them. Partially looking at the snake but pointing his wand straight at it, Harry whispered: " *Wingardium Leviosa* ."

The snake shot up five feet in the air. Harry directed the writhing and floating snake to Malfoy, who immediately turned fearful.

"What are you playing at?" he shouted in English, staring directly at a hissing, confused snake.

Harry tried not to let his resounding disappointment show as he muttered the counter-jinx and a *Petrificus Totalus* to follow. The snake vanished in a puff of smoke and Malfoy's arms snapped to his sides, his legs sprang together, and his whole body went rigid as he fell to the ground heavily. Harry was dimly aware of the silence that spread through the crowd as the students stared at him. Lockhart was staring at him too, and it was same, fearful look he cast when Harry used the stasis charm for the first time.

Snape ordered the students to practice disarming each other by magic in pairs again, and Lockhart meekly assisted him. Snape kept pairing up Harry against the older students, so he had to be good at it very quickly least he gave Snape the satisfaction of seeing him fail. Harry thought he did a decent job, all things considered. The only person Harry failed to disarm was a handsome Hufflepuff fourth year, and it was mostly because Neville rammed into Harry after Hermione's disarming charm blasted him off his feet. Harry dropped his wand, and the Hufflepuff fourth year disarmed him before he could recover. Snape was looking right at Harry when the students were finally dismissed. It was a shrewd and calculating look, and Harry didn't like it.

He felt someone tugged at the back of his robes as the students milled out.

"C'mon," Ron said into his ear. "Let's move on…"

Ron and Hermione herded Harry straight to the empty Music Room without saying a thing. Ron pushed Harry into a noise-cancelling screen and Hermione drew the curtains around them.

"I thought we were going to do this secretly, not in front of the whole school!" hissed Ron.

"Sorry," said Harry. "But I thought the chance was too good to miss."

"You can't just go ahead without warning us like that!" said Ron angrily. "And it was creepy, you know, the way you levitated the snake towards Malfoy…"

"But it was the only way to get Malfoy to speak Parseltongue!" said Harry, starting to feel quite angry. "It worked, didn't it? Now we know Malfoy isn't a Parselmouth!"

"Yeah, all that effort for nothing and I was *so* sure it was Malfoy," grumbled Ron, before saying: "Listen, I know you don't think so, but most people have a hard time doing the stuff you do."

Harry frowned at him. "But Hermione's better than-"

"You didn't hear what everyone else was saying," said Hermione, speaking in a hushed voice. "They were saying you're *too* good-maybe good enough to control Slytherin's monster."

Harry's mouth fell open.

"Exactly," said Ron. "And now the whole school is going to think you're heir of Slytherin."

"But I'm not," said Harry, with a panic he couldn't quite explain.

" *We* know you're not," said Hermione quickly. "But everyone else doesn't know what *we* know."

Harry lay awake for hours that night. Through a gap in the curtains around his four-poster he watched snow starting to drift past the tower window and wondered…

Should he *ever* tell Ron and Hermione he could speak Parseltongue? He had enough suspicion going on without throwing Parseltongue in the mix. Ron and Hermione might start thinking he was Slytherin's great-great-great-great-grandson or something… could he entrust them with this knowledge?

Of course I can, Harry thought. They're my best friends.

Ah, said a nasty little voice in his brain, but they never had to deal with something this big, have they?

Harry turned over. He wasn't anything special. His survival after an encounter with Voldemort as a baby was a huge fluke for which he did nothing to contribute, and anyone who had Sherlock Holmes to coach them in logic and reasoning would have an easier time learning magic. Tomorrow he would go about his way as always, and he would perform nothing really spectacular, which (he thought angrily, pummelling his pillow) any fool should know by now.

By next morning, however, the snow that had begun in the night had turned into a blizzard so thick that the last Herbology lesson of the term was cancelled: Professor Sprout wanted to fit socks and scarves on the Mandrakes, a tricky operation she would entrust to no one else, now that it was so important for the Mandrakes to grow quickly and revive Mrs. Norris and Colin Creevey.

Harry fretted and brooded while Ron and Hermione used their time off to play a game of wizard chess.

"For heaven's sake, Harry," said Hermione, exasperated, as one of Ron's bishops wrestled her knight off his horse and dragged him off the board. "Go take a walk if you're going to brood."

So Harry got up and left through the portrait hole, wondering if he should call John.

The castle was darker than it usually was in daytime because of the

thick, swirling grey snow at every window. Shivering, Harry walked past classrooms where lessons were taking place, catching snatches of what was happening within. Professor McGonagall was shouting at someone who, by the sound of it, had turned his friend into a badger. Resisting the urge to take a look, Harry walked on by, thinking he might as well go to Music Room and use the noise-cancelling screens.

Only Miss Jackie was present in the Music Room, playing something solemn and relaxing on one of the concert pianos. She looked a bit absurd wearing a gigantic white puffa jacket that made her look like marshmallow monster had partially digested her, and the black micro-fleece trousers and grey Ugg boots that did little to hide her bony legs and tiny feet. The notes rose sonorously up the ceiling as the melody became more grandiose. Then Miss Jackie looked up when Harry got closer and squawked, mashing keys in the process.

"I'm sorry," Harry said, abashed. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Oh, no, do forgive me," breathed Miss Jackie. "I was a bit preoccupied."

Miss Jackie patted the spot next to her on the long piano chair. Harry sat there, and listened to Miss Jackie resume playing the piece from earlier an octave lower. The knot in his chest seemed to loosen as the piece progressed, and settled more easily in his stomach when the piece ended on a long, lingering note.

"Bee in your bonnet, Harry?" asked Miss Jackie as she quietly shut the keyboard cover.

"Er," said Harry, wondering if he could confide to Miss Jackie. "I was just thinking-about the Chamber of Secrets…"

"Ah," said Miss Jackie, "The Chamber of Secrets. It's on the mind of a lot of people these days. What is about it that's bothering you?"

"The way people are reacting to it," said Harry. "My friend Neville-I told him his amulets aren't going to help him ward off the monster, but he still keeps them around. And when you listen to the rumours, it's like…" he made a frustrated gesture. How could he explain the

way people believed in the most outrageous things?

"Everyone is ready to jump at any suspicious-looking sign, not pausing to think if it's actually suspicious or not?" asked Miss Jackie.

Harry lit up. "Yes! Yes, that exactly! Why can't people *think?* "

Miss Jackie just smiled at his explosive reaction.

"It's not easy, this situation," she said. "People are *afraid* and understandably so. Anyone who stands out can fall under suspicion- a bad time for people who are rubbish at picking up cues." She smiled ruefully. "I'm afraid I've made myself look suspicious, using my duplication spell freely as I have. I've been told there is some rumour going on that I may be using my duplicate to attack people and stay above suspicion."

"But you only use your clones for work and your clones can't even use magic!" said Harry indignantly.

"Am I?" asked Miss Jackie mildly. "Can you prove it? What is your evidence?"

Harry frowned. "Why are you…?"

"You have to see this from the outsider's perspective," Miss Jackie explained. "These are the sort of questions *I* would raise if I found someone suspicious, so I should be prepared to answer them myself. If I can't give an answer, I shouldn't expect an outsider to just take me at my word. They don't know me after all, and I'm just another human being, as capable of lying and hiding as they themselves are. At the very least, I need to give people no excuse to hold on to their opinions."

Harry looked down at the keyboard cover. Miss Jackie had a knack of raising uncomfortable questions that made you question your shallow thinking.

"So what are you going to do?" he asked.

"The only thing I *can* do," said Miss Jackie. "Invite people to examine me."

Harry stared at her. "You're not afraid of people drawing the wrong conclusion?"

"No," said Miss Jackie. "I have nothing to hide. I have no reason to fear scrutiny. If my questioners reach the wrong conclusion, then I will question my questioners-they are just as obligated as I am to provide answers."

"But if everyone gangs up against you-"

"So be it," said Miss Jackie, sounding unconcerned. "I have friends and family whom I can trust and confide in. Thank you for the reminder, Harry. I almost forgot that I should share this at Small Group next Tuesday…"

"You tell them about Hogwarts?" asked Harry, slightly surprised.

"As much as I am able; it's a funny thing, sharing my life here to them," Miss Jackie smiled, "Not because I have to hide the magic bits, but because sharing my heart isn't something I do naturally. My first instinct is keep the ugly stuff to myself and spare others my troubles. But those girls- especially *Ellen*," she chuckled, "they get upset when I hide things, which, I'm sorry to say, happens often: in my effort to hide the things they can't know, I end up hiding *everything*, which is really not on." She grinned self-deprecatingly. "I keep making the foolish mistake of not even *trying* to help them understand. It takes a lot of effort, reminding myself to not to be stupid out of habit: Of course I can tell my friends Hogwarts is facing a threat; London goes through several each day, and Ellen is a Detective Inspector's wife- if anyone knows how to weather bad times and bad news, it's her. And of course I can tell my friends I feel sad that, despite my efforts, students still hold me in suspicion. Don't we all go through that kind of misunderstanding? *Shouldn't* I go to the people who won't misunderstand me?"

Harry nodded. When it was put this way, it made sense.

"Some people think *I'm* the Heir of Slytherin," said Harry, feeling as though he should-and indeed *could* - share this. "I don't get it. How can I be the Heir of Slytherin when I'm Gryffindor? I-" he remembered the Sorting Hat's words again. "I'm-" he stopped.

"Did the Sorting Hat consider putting you elsewhere?" asked Miss Jackie gently.

Harry nodded glumly.

"It happens," said Miss Jackie. "Jason and Jeremy got sorted into Slytherin after the Hat offered Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw as alternatives. Oh yes," she said at Harry's shocked face, "my sister Cecilia was sorted into Slytherin, too. No one else attended Hogwarts in my family, so I can't say if Julia is an anomaly or not."

Harry kept shaking his head in shock. He didn't know Mr. Jason and Mr. Jeremy that well, but they had a completely different vibe from the Slytherins he knew, so he assumed they'd been sorted into Hufflepuff, just like Julia.

"My brothers are very goal-oriented," said Miss Jackie. "Jason wanted to be a celebrity chef and own a chain of restaurants and hotels since he was five. Jeremy is determined to start his own fashion brand, and he's aiming for both the Muggle and Wizarding world markets. Their goal is their main thing; hard work, courage and intelligence are just *means* to achieve it. So, Slytherin it is."

"And your sister?"

"She wanted to be influential," said Miss Jackie. "She didn't care in what way or in what area."

"I don't understand."

"It's hard to explain without making it sound bad," said Miss Jackie, rubbing her neck apologetically. "She was exceptionally powerful and she knew it. Her goal was to make sure everyone else acknowledged it too. She couldn't settled down. She had so much pent up energy and talent just waiting to be spent, but she couldn't stay in one field long enough to properly spend them. She moved to the next thing before the dust settled on the last move. The world couldn't move fast enough for her and that made her frustrated and angry."

This sounded a lot like Sherlock, except Mrs. Cecilia didn't have the

Work.

"I thought she'd never find rest," said Miss Jackie sadly. "I still wonder if she ever did. I'll never know, not on this side of glory. At least she didn't leave behind a ghost."

Harry did a double-take. "What do you mean?"

"It is acknowledged only wizards and witches who fear death, who have strong attachments to this world become ghosts," said Miss Jackie quietly. "Cecilia didn't leave behind a ghost. She moved on."

Harry swallowed. He'd wondered about it, ever since first year, why some people became ghosts and others didn't. None of the ghosts in Hogwarts were forthcoming on this question, and he'd pretty much given up on getting a straight answer. He never expected to get one now, from his music teacher no less.

"You talk as if ghosts aren't the actual person," Harry murmured.

"I'm convinced we *are* souls who have bodies, and our souls departs after death, regardless of how much we want to stay," said Miss Jackie, looking at Harry through her fathomless eyes. "Witches and wizards have magic, so they have more things to leave behind, unlike our Muggle brethren, who can only leave behind bodies. I think magic people can't *become* ghosts, but a person's magic can linger on after they die *as* ghosts… but I'm just confusing you, aren't I?"

"No, um," said Harry, feeling his way through his tangled thoughts, "So you think ghosts are just a person's magic, walking and, er, moving and talking like they used to-"

"-like a memory," said Miss Jackie, nodding, "an unliving, interactive memory, neither here nor there…"

Harry stayed a little longer after this conversation. Miss Jackie gave him a mug of hot chocolate with plenty of fresh whipped cream on top, and talked a bit more about ghosts. Then she played a couple of songs on the violin for Harry to consider practicing after the holidays. The first one was so heart-rending Harry felt a tear slide

down his cheek, and the other was the sort of music you'd want to hear before embarking on a long, arduous journey. Harry picked the latter piece and said good-bye to Miss Jackie so he could go to Transfigurations.

He met Ron and Hermione outside the Portrait Hole a few minutes later, after taking a detour to avoid Lockhart as usual.

"There you are!" said Ron, " *finally!* We were worried you got attacked or something…"

"Never mind that," said Harry. "Listen, I have a bunch of stuff to tell you…"

Harry rapidly told Ron and Hermione the little factoids about ghosts he'd learned from Miss Jackie as they headed to Transfigurations. Most ghosts, even the friendly ones, rarely opened up to the living, but even the most uncommunicative ghosts were happy to talk about *how* they died and became more amenable to speak after you carefully listened to the manner in which they met their deaths. Miss Jackie had learned this as she was trying to find out if her sister Cecilia left a ghost.

Hermione was fascinated.

"So we should've asked how they died first, before we asked our questions," she said.

"Why would anyone want to talk about how they died?" said Ron. "Sounds dead depressing to me…"

"Well, that's what they want, isn't it?" said Hermione. "I'm sure we'll learn a lot of personal history if nothing else, and it's definitely something to start a conversation with."

They reached the Transfiguration classroom. Professor McGonagall's previous class were milling out, one of whom still had black-and-white-striped hair. Harry, Ron and Hermione had just settled into desks when they heard a loud bang down the corridor, followed by a scream:

"ATTACK! ATTACK! ANOTHER ATTACK! NO MORTAL OR

GHOST IS SAFE! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES! ATTAAAACK!"

Crash - crash - crash-door after door flew open along the corridor and people flooded out. Harry, Ron and Hermione swiftly joined the panicking throng, and Professor McGonagall ran after them. For several long minutes, there was a scene of much confusion, where no one was sure what was going on or where they should be heading. Professor McGonagall used her wand to set off a loud bang, which restored silence, and ordered everyone back into their classes. No sooner had the scene cleared, Harry felt as though his stomach had dissolved.

All the rooster cages in the vicinity had been broken into and smashed against the floor, with no trace of their former occupants except for a few lonely feathers. Miss Jackie was laying on the middle of the floor, rigid and cold, her eyes wide and staring blankly at the ceiling. And that wasn't all. Next to her was another figure, and it was the strangest sight Harry had ever seen.

It was Nearly Headless Nick, no longer pearly-white and transparent, but black and smoky, floating immobile and horizontal six inches off the floor. His head was half off and his face wore an expression of shock.

Peeves was bobbing overhead, grinning wickedly, surveying the scene; Peeves always loved chaos. As the teachers bent over Miss Jackie and Nearly Headless Nick, examining them, Peeves broke into song:

" *Oh, monster, oh, monster, what have you done,*

You're killing off Squibs, and you think it's great fun… "

"That's enough Peeves!" barked Professor McGonagall, and Peeves zoomed away backward, blowing a raspberry.

Miss Jackie was carried up to the hospital wing by Professor Flitwick and Professor Sinistra of the Astronomy department, but nobody seemed to know what to do for Nearly Headless Nick. In the end, Professor McGonagall conjured a large fan out of thin air, which she gave to Ernie Macmillan with instructions to waft Nearly Headless

Nick up the stairs. This Ernie did, fanning Nick along like a silent black hovercraft. This left Harry, Ron and Hermione and Professor McGonagall alone together.

"I will escort you back to the classroom," said Professor McGonagall heavily.

Harry didn't move. He was still staring at the spot where Miss Jackie had lay petrified, unable to digest what he'd seen earlier. Ron and Hermione had to pull him away to get him moving, and even then, he couldn't tear his eyes away from the spot.

Harry went through Transfiguration in a daze. It wasn't until he found himself back in the Gryffindor Common Room did he speak.

"I only talked to her an hour ago," he said.

Hermione shot a glance at Harry. Both she and Ron were looking as though Harry had confirmed a horrible theory they'd had.

"What's wrong?"

Hermione looked stricken and reluctant to speak. Ron shook his head and ploughed ahead:

"We went looking for you when you didn't return after we finished our game. We thought you might've gone to the library to meet up Ernie and Justin so we went there. All the Hufflepuffs who take Herbology with us were in the back except Justin. Then out of the blue Ernie says he told Justin to hide up in their dormitory because if the Heir of Slytherin is targeting all of Harry Potter's friends it is best for him to keep a low profile for a while."

Harry's jaw dropped. Justin hadn't shown up for the last two weeks of meet ups, and Ernie had told him it was because he had a lot of catching up to do before Christmas Holidays. Harry had taken him at his word, and hadn't suspected a thing.

"Why would they think-"

"Think about all the victims," whispered Hermione. "You've been working with Filch all October because of the electric generator.

Next thing we know, Filch's cat is attacked. Colin has been following you around since the start of term, taking pictures and asking questions. Next thing we know, Colin's been attacked."

Harry couldn't shut his mouth, he was so aghast.

"And now Nick and Miss Jackie," said Hermione miserably. "We've been asking all those questions to Nick - and we've been spending almost every other evening in the Music Room this past month. Even before that, you were there every day to recharge your phone or have violin lessons. It's not hard to notice every single person who's been attacked so far spent a lot of time with you."

Harry felt sick. This-this was worse than wondering if he was the Heir of Slytherin. Moreover…

"Ernie's been thinking about this for weeks and he didn't tell me."

"That's what I said," snarled Ron. "Do you know what Ernie said to me? He said at least he wasn't like Zacharias Smith, who actually thinks *you're* the Heir of Slytherin! Seriously, what's *wrong* with these people?"

Harry buried his face in his hands. He couldn't take it anymore.

"But here is some good news!" said Hermione in a rush. "Susan disagrees with Ernie and Smith. She said it's cowardly and stupid to alienate you when you're clearly working hard to solve the mystery. The fourth year you duelled yesterday, Cedric Diggory, said Susan is right. Oh, and Julia said she, uh, kicked Zacharias Smith between the legs when he went on about his theory that you're the Heir of Slytherin in the Hufflepuff common room."

The last one bit of information made Harry let out an involuntary snort of laughter. Then, after taking several deep breaths, Harry looked up.

"Do you want to take a break, too?"

"Don't be stupid," said Ron.

"We're going to finish this together," said Hermione firmly.

Harry smiled weakly, warmed a little bit at his friends' solidarity. But that didn't make him more optimistic. They've spent an entire month blundering around trying to find clues, and had barely made any progress on their own. In fact, Harry thought miserably, they were right where Sherlock had left them a week ago. The problem was that they couldn't see the sort of things Sherlock could see and make the connections he could make.

"I wish… " said Harry. "… I wish Sherlock could take a look in person. For just ten minutes. No, *five* minutes."

"He'd figure it out in a minute," Ron agreed.

"But he's a *Muggle*," said Hermione. "There's all sort of spells and enchantments in and around Hogwarts to keep Muggles from figuring out it exists. Even if we bring him here, the Muggle-repelling charms in the castle will scramble up his senses and make him think he has some urgent appointment elsewhere."

"He never has appointments like that," Harry muttered.

" *The point is*," said Hermione, pressing on, "there's too many things that'll work against him. Besides, Dumbledore will get in trouble-*huge* trouble. Bringing a Muggle into Hogwarts is going to be a huge violation against International Statute of Secrecy, no matter what the cause."

"But if the Heir of Slytherin isn't caught soon, there won't *be* a Hogwarts to go to!" Harry shouted. "Don't you see? They'll close it down! We'll all be sent home and there won't be anyone left to figure out who did it! Maybe the Ministry of Magic will open a new school, but to make sure something like this doesn't happen again, they might stop taking in Muggle-borns! Do you *want* Slytherin to have his way?"

He glared at them.

"You're right Harry," said Hermione in a small voice. "We don't."

"It's Christmas Holidays in a few days, so there's going to be less people about in the castle soon," said Ron, "perfect timing."

"We have to figure out how to bring him here in secret, and stop the Muggle-repelling charms from messing up his head," said Harry. "There has to be away."

"There *is* a way!" said Hermione suddenly, her face shining. "Miss Jackie's anti-magic barrier: if we wrap him up in a cloak soaked in the anti-magic solution, we might be able to bring him here through the floo network! Miss Jackie probably improved the solution since the last time-we just need her notes!"

There was no time to waste. The three of them stood up and raced to the Music Room.

Final Notes : The plot thickens… ;)

The Grandmaster

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Six: The Grandmaster

John knew the moment the kids stepped off Hogwarts Express that something was wrong. Harry was worrying the inside of his mouth, and Julia clung to Lestrade and refused to let go. Neither of them was inclined to talk, so John and Lestrade were left to share confused and worried looks until they went their separate ways.

The cab dropped John and Harry off in front of 221B. The room above was brilliantly lit, and, even as John looked up, Sherlock's tall and sparse figure passed twice in a dark silhouette against the window. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest. To John, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was in Work-mode. John unlocked the door and helped carry Harry's trunk upstairs.

Sherlock's manner of greeting was not effusive. It seldom was. But he was glad, John thought, to see Harry. Hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly eye, he waved Harry to the armchair, and indicated the mug of hot-chocolate on the side table. Then he stood before the fire and looked Harry over in his singular introspective fashion.

"Violin suits you," he remarked. "You've progressed well beyond scales and are learning actual pieces."

"I was going to start pieces this week," Harry said.

"I would've thought you had a preview at least. Ah, you did, but you never had an actual lesson," Sherlock frowned. "So Jacqueline was the latest victim?"

"How did you know?"

"Jacqueline prefers to move quickly to actual pieces, and let students acquire technique along the way. You already know how to read sheet music, so it is a matter of acclimatizing yourself to the violin. The callus development on your fingers shows you've been practicing almost daily, some fingers more frequently than the others. Doing more than just scales, obviously; therefore, pieces. But Jacqueline hasn't started those lessons. She never interrupts lessons for anything short of ill-health, but you're fine, and she has been in regular communication with me until last week. The interruption is from her side then, but it's not illness. Nothing short of death, unconsciousness or forced immobilization will stop Jacqueline from doing her job, so- she's the latest victim."

"But I saw her last Thursday at the clinic!" John protested.

"It was probably her clone," said Harry.

"Come again?"

"Miss Jackie has a spell that lets her duplicate herself," Harry explained. "She's been sending her duplicates to do most of her Muggle work."

"Doppelganger spells. *Figures*," John muttered. "How do you know it's the actual her that was Petrified?"

"Clones can't do magic, and the not-petrified Miss Jackies couldn't do any," said Harry. To Sherlock he said, "So you *were* working with Miss Jackie to get to Hogwarts. I thought you might be, when I found Miss Jackie's notes."

"Do you have them?" asked Sherlock, eyes gleaming.

"We found this stuffed inside a Tuba," said Harry. He opened his

messenger bag and pulled out a large leather-bound journal that had a red lanyard closure with an intricate Chinese butterfly knot and black stone ornament attached to the front cover. "No one could understand what she wrote down, though."

John took a look at the notes as Sherlock perused the journal and immediately understood why. Jacqueline hadn't written down her notes in a linear fashion like a normal human being, but had drawn them out in beautifully illustrated diagrams that had branches radiating out from the center node, and less than 10% of the written words were English.

"We only thought this was her anti-magic barrier notes because of this," said Harry, pointing out a page that had a branch labeled in dark red letters 'Anti-magic' somewhere in the middle of the upper right hand quadrant. A branch radiating out from the anti-magic branch was labeled 'Sherlock' in black letters. "Dumbledore said the notes were written in *code* -it doesn't make sense if you just read it."

John sighed. "Jack, *why* ?"

"Dumbledore said the same thing," said Harry, sighing too.

Sherlock glared at the notes as if they were personally offensive. Then, slowly, his furrowed brow cleared.

" *Ah*," he said. "I see."

"What do you see?" John asked.

"You know my methods," said Sherlock. "Use them."

"I can't make out anything, so quit stalling," John groused.

"On the contrary, you have at least one idea. Tell me."

John scowled at Sherlock before stating, "No one can possibly read these notes."

"Yes, exactly," said Sherlock. "These notes are not meant to be *read* . You recall Jacqueline got a laptop to work in Hogwarts. If she wanted someone who doesn't have non-magic prejudice to read and

understand her notes, she would've typed it up in an electronic document."

"I have her laptop," said Harry brightly.

Sherlock beamed at him. "Excellent."

They pulled the laptop out from Harry's trunk. It was password protected, but the hint made the passcode rather obvious: 'what am I working on right now?'

"Anti-magic barrier," said Sherlock, typing.

He managed to log in after two tries (the first A had to be capitalized). Sherlock opened the folder labeled 'notes' on the desktop screen. The folder contained several documents, all of which had rather whimsical file names such as: ' *The Magical Mobile Network - let the mockery begin* ', ' *Sir Tim Berners-Lee will kill me if he sees this* ' and ' *How to get sentenced for life in Azkaban without using any of the Unforgivables* '. Sherlock ignored all of them and went straight for ' *Dear Sherlock '* . The document contained a typed letter from Jacqueline:

Dear Sherlock,

If you are reading this, that means I have failed to fulfill your request myself. So first off: I'm sorry.

As per our last conversation, there are three barriers that prevent you from visiting.

1. Physically arriving there

2. Without being seen by anyone

3. Without magic knocking you senseless

I have solutions for problems 1&3: use Floo and wear something soaked in special ink-regular ink won't do-mixed with J's blood. I haven't figured out how to solve problem 2 since the anti-magic

properties of solution 3 would cancel out any disillusionment or invisibility charms, but AD assured me you have a way.

Sincerely,

JS

"Okay," said John. "Obviously Dumbledore is hinting at the invisibility cloak for problem two. But what does Jack mean by special ink?"

Sherlock palmed the black stone ornament attached to the red chord of the journal.

"This is an Inkstick," he said, "used in East Asian Calligraphy. You grind this against an inkstone with a small quantity of water to produce ink."

" *Oh*," said John. "I see. So the journal was meant to be *found*, not read. It was the lanyard that was important."

"Precisely," said Sherlock. "Most people who find this journal would overlook the lanyard as decorative-note the ornamental butterfly knot that further obfuscates its nature-and waste time trying to decipher the contents."

"Brilliant," said John. "So all we need is an inkstone."

Sherlock headed to the shelf full of odds and ends, and took a flat stone mortar that was carved so there was a small reservoir at one end and a tiny ceramic water pot.

"She sent these to me mid-November," he said.

Harry frowned at that.

"This file was last saved at the mid-November, too," he said. "And Dumbledore called me and Ginny to his office *early* November. Why did you wait for so long? Why did he want to talk to Ginny, anyway?"

"There is more than finding the culprit at stake," said Sherlock grimly. "The motive is simple enough to follow: Lucius Malfoy is using this fiasco to destroy the reputation of several people. The Hogwarts student populous has been on the verge of panic since Hallowe'en. If Dumbledore searched a student's belongings in such an atmosphere and news of it breaks out- which it will-the whole school will go in an uproar and the student's parents would face an inquiry. Summarily searching the belongings of all students will only generate a bigger uproar and a multitude of opportunities for the student to hide the trigger somewhere it would be harder to find, so that can't be done lightly either."

Harry looked flabbergasted.

"So Lucius Malfoy was behind this whole thing after all?" he stammered, "But *how* ? The Chamber of Secrets was before his time and Draco isn't a parselmouth, so his family can't be Slytherin's descendants!"

"Lucius Malfoy planted the thing that *triggered* the attacks," said Sherlock. "Think, Harry: who is the biggest target of Lucius Malfoy's contempt? And when and where could he have planted the trigger on a Hogwarts' student?"

Slowly, comprehension dawned on Harry's face.

"Mr. Malfoy hates Mr. Weasley because he's against pure-blood supremacy. Mr. Malfoy gave the trigger to Ginny in Flourish and Blotts back in August. He picked up Ginny's old Transfiguration book and started that fight with Mr. Weasley to slip it into her cauldron."

"Or inside her book," said Sherlock. "Just think of the ways a book can be used for Dark Magic: one that burns your eyes out the moment you open it-hypnotizes you as you read the contents- the possibilities are *endless* ."

Both John and Harry nodded.

"But speculation is pointless unless we can discover the trigger," said Sherlock. "So let's focus on making the ink."

He poured a bit of water to the inkstone and started grinding the Inkstick against the plane. John immediately noticed a bright glimmer that couldn't be explained by reflective lighting that sparkled off the black surface as the fresh ink collected in the reservoir. Sherlock poured the ink into a spray bottle and added more water to add volume. The black solution looked unremarkable unless you swirled it-then the bright glimmer returned to the surface as it rippled. John obligingly pricked a thumb with a sanitized pin and let a few droplets of blood mix into the ink. Immediately the ink bloomed with a darkness that seemed to swallow up all light that attempted to penetrate its opaque depths. Sherlock didn't bother to shake the solution; clearly it was unnecessary.

"Now to find an appropriate clothing to use this on," said Sherlock.

"How about your coat?" John suggested.

"Don't be absurd."

"You're going to wear it anyway, so why not?"

Sherlock scowled. "I'm not ruining my coat with ink!"

"It's either your coat or a bed sheet," John pointed out. "Bed sheets won't keep you warm."

"Bed sheet it is," said Sherlock, and flounced off to the bedroom.

John and Harry shared a look.

"Vain prat," said John fondly.

While Sherlock faffed around trying to find a substitute for his bloody coat, John and Harry sat by the sitting table and chatted. Harry talked more freely now that the burden of solving the mystery was fully in Sherlock's hands.

The double attack on Jacqueline and Nearly Headless Nick turned what had hitherto been nervousness into real panic. Curiously, it was Nearly Headless Nick's fate that seemed to worry people most.

What could possibly do that to a *ghost* ? people asked each other; what terrible power could harm someone who was already dead? There was almost a stampede to book seats on the Hogwarts Express so that students could go home for Christmas. The Weasley children were among the very few students who remained. Ron, Fred, George, and Ginny chose to stay at school rather than visit their oldest brother Bill in Egypt with Arthur and Molly. Percy, who disapproved of what he termed their childish behavior, told them pompously that *he* was only staying over Christmas because it was his duty as a prefect to support the teachers during this troubled time.

"Did you leave your phone with Ron?" asked John.

"Uh-huh," said Harry. "Should I tell him to wait for Sherlock in the Common Room with Ginny?"

"Yep. And as much as possible, try not to punch him," said John, and Harry grinned.

Eventually Sherlock burst into the sitting room brandishing his tartan bathrobe-" *dressing gown*, John," said Sherlock in a deeply offended tone-which he had sprayed liberally with the ink-blood solution. He put it on, draped Harry's invisibility cloak on top of it and completely vanished from sight.

"Perfect," said Sherlock's voice from somewhere around the fireplace.

John calmly drank a cup of tea whilst texting Dumbledore:

Sherlock is geared up and ready to brave Hogwarts. Ready when you are.

Dumbledore replied immediately:

Excellent. Now please enjoy a lovely Christmas at Mr. Lestrade's

---

Christmas arrived at London, cold and wet. John was woken up too early by Sherlock, who was doing unspeakable things. John

retaliated in like manner until they both fell asleep again.

Harry burst into their room at around ten, still wearing his pyjamas.

"Merry Christmas!" he shouted, jumping into their bed.

Sherlock buried his face into the pillow and groaned. "What are you, six?"

John reached out to ruffle two set of black hairs as Harry ignored the grumpy comment and crawled into the space between them. "Merry Christmas to you, too," said John sleepily.

They unwrapped presents a couple of hours later by the Christmas tree, which this year John made to look like a five-foot tall Dalek with Mrs. Hudson, who was already imbibing the Christmas wine. Per tradition, John's gift from Sherlock was wrapped in the ugliest set of pyjamas known to man, with a pair of socks you wouldn't even wear at your own funeral tied on top like bow. John wore both items per tradition whilst ignoring the actual gift (a new laptop to replace the Macbook Sherlock destroyed in the name of Science). Hagrid had sent them a large tin of treacle fudge that had the consistency of solidified cement and needed to soften by the fire before consumption. The Grangers and Hermione sent singing Christmas cards and tooth-flossing string mints. Ron gave Harry a bulging bag of dung-bombs, and Molly sent three hand-knitted jumpers and a large plum cake.

"What did you get for Mr. Weasley?" asked Harry as he pulled his new jumper over his head.

"A remote control car," said John, unwrapping an anonymous gift was the clearly from Snape-it had a clear vial of transparent potion that was laconically labeled: ' *for liars* '-wondering if Snape got the bag of Kona coffee they'd sent and if Dumbledore was really enjoying the wooly socks he claimed to want instead of books everyone insisted on gifting him. "We wanted to get him a helicopter, but it was too expensive and Molly would probably burst a vein."

"And an RC car won't?" said Sherlock, wrinkling his nose at his Weasley Jumper, which was violet, large, and didn't suit him at all.

"I don't think so," said John firmly. "Arthur only goes berserk when mundane air travel enters the picture."

They spent a lazy afternoon nibbling on Mrs. Hudson's minced pies and playing a wizard game called Exploding Snap. At John's prompting, Harry called Mycroft to bid him a very Merry Christmas in a bright, enthusiastic voice. Silence prevailed on the line for a full minute before Mycroft stiffly replied 'likewise' and abruptly ended the call, much to Sherlock's amusement. Thus having observed all formalities and necessary ribbing of family members, and tucking a dozing and drunken Mrs. Hudson to bed, Sherlock, John and Harry went to Lestrade's Christmas dinner party.

Lestrade's flat looked magnificent. Now that magic was a shared secret, Lestrade's former in-laws went out of their way to make the Christmas festivities as magical as possible. Minor issues like spatial limitations were quickly tossed to the side. The inner dimensions of Lestrade's modest three-room flat now rivaled a minor cathedral. Eight frost-covered, brilliantly lit Christmas trees bordered the living room walls, thick streamers of holly and mistletoe crisscrossed the ceiling, and enchanted snow was falling, warm and dry, from the newly conjured glass chandelier decorated with real fairy lights, much to the delight of the kids. The floating candles John had only seen in photographs were everywhere, providing a warm glow to the overall lighting. Jason, who was an aspiring chef, not only provided a ten course meal worthy of a Michelin star restaurant, but gave them all a tour to his portable greenhouses in which he grew all his grains, produce and herbs, as well as his magical state-of-the-art kitchen. The concept was similar to a wizard tent, except Jason didn't use something as pedestrian as a *tent*, but kept the doors to his greenhouses and kitchen inside a drawstring bag, which had an undetectable extension charm, and attached the doors to a wall for instant access. Even Lestrade, who was still wary of magic, was impressed at this.

"So this is how you grow your own food," he said, staring at the vast interior of the greenhouse full of fruit trees and vegetables.

"Yep," said Jason proudly. "Feel free to take what you like when you like. I'll leave a door."

"Great. Thanks," said Lestrade with a funny look on his face. "So you wizards have a solution to world-hunger."

"I *wish*," Jason groaned. "Like, last year when South Africa had that huge draught, I stupidly tried to distribute fresh veggies and cereals, and everyone wanted to know how I got hold of the water supply to, you know, *grow them locally*, because obviously the fruit was freshly picked-"

"They asked you that kind of questions?" said Lestrade, surprised. "I figured they'd be too hungry to care."

"Oh, trust me, they *do*," said Jason, shuddering a little. "I also almost got caught in a huge riot in Haiti after that earthquake when the people there thought the UN was handing out expired rations. The hysteria was so bad I scrapped the idea of setting up a food kitchen and just focused on conjuring and handing out water bottles."

Ellen and Lestrade relaxed to their magical surroundings and displays of magic after this exchange. Jeremy transfigured a pile of sugar-cubes into all sorts of old-fashioned toys for Martin and Rupert to play with and convinced Lestrade to hand over his suits to make alterations that guaranteed the next time Greg wore them, it would cause people's internal organs and undergarments to implode on sight. Jacqueline's three clones provided live music when one of them weren't distracting Sherlock with the contents of Jason's greenhouses (he was deeply fascinated at the bees Jason kept for honey and pollination). Even the dour and saturnine Mr. Shin charmed Ellen, Greg and the all the children with his enchanted origami, which folded and unfolded themselves smoothly into a flock of birds that nibbled affectionately at their ears, a herd of tiny horses that galloped realistically, and a dragon that breathed real fire and paper cranes, directing their movements via his hands like a conductor of an orchestra.

"S'not bad, this magic business," said Lestrade, slurring slightly after his fifth helping of mulled wine.

John took a deep draught of wassail. "Yeah; and the way Dumbledore fixed my shoulder was pretty sleek."

"Oh, yeah?" said Lestrade, grinning stupidly as the children pointed and laughed at the paper dinosaur that lurched at their direction, roaring. "Hey, do you think he could fix your-"

John knew where this was going. "Stop gossiping with your wife, Lestrade."

Lestrade hastily dropped the subject and joined the kids in their battle against the paper dinosaur that was probably a miniature Godzilla. John headed to Jason's kitchen, ostensibly to fetch more wassail. John wanted to corner Jacqueline, but the idea of talking to her clone, even one that was a perfect copy of Jacqueline, felt weird.

Six Jasons were working inside the kitchen when John entered. John asked the Jason doing something vicious to a vat of eggnog where the real Jason was, and the clone pointed at the Jason slumped in front of the blazing pizza oven. John sat next to the hunched figure that looked younger than his purported twenty years.

"How are you holding up?" asked John.

Jason rubbed his eyes. "I'll live."

"Is it really necessary, pretending like nothing's wrong?" asked John quietly.

"Jack's going to recover, and this is more important," said Jason stubbornly. "Greg and Ellen needs to befriend magic and *soon* . You can't live in war against something that's part of you and stay sane."

John recalled the children's book by Brian Bumblebee. "Going insane hating your magic is a sad reality, I take it?"

"Happens more often from where Dad was raised," confirmed Jason. "It's a pretty common thing there, Muggle parents abandoning their Magic children in temples or handing them over to shamans. A lot Asian countries don't have the kind of Muggle-born support system the Western countries have. You can imagine how a child reacts when they realise their parents abandoned them because of their magic."

John nodded, sobered at the news. "Did Jack insist you guys carry

on, no matter what happens?"

"She told us to not stop at anything short of death, yeah," said Jason, wiping his nose. He pulled a face. "Ew, gross, I can't believe I just did that. Excuse me; I need to wash my hands."

Jason marched over to the sinks and splashed water all over his hands, face and hair. Then he started shouting in Italian, which made all his clones bellow ' *Bene* !' and work like things possessed. Knowing Jason chose to work so hard he could momentarily forget the fact his older sister was petrified by the darkest sort of magic out there, John left the kitchen with a large pint of wassail. John wasn't about to point out the wrongness of the situation for the sake of pointing it out-that was Sherlock's thing-when the Shin family was already risking so much disclosing their hidden world as much as they could dare.

John surveyed the living room after stepping out of kitchen. Jeremy was dazzling Rupert and Martin with the pure white owl he purchased from Kazakhstan. Julia was levitating a snow globe with the new Ollivander wand her grandfather got her for Christmas, squealing: "Daddy! Daddy, it *works* !" and Ellen and Greg were clapping, looking a bit dazed. Harry had his own wand out, and was making a rattle do cartwheels for baby Elise's amusement. Elise giggled and squeaked in Ellen's arms, and made grasping motions at the rattle.

John looked down and contemplated the wassail. Downing it one go sounded like a very good idea. Unfortunately, Sherlock snatched the pint away before John could carry it out.

"I need your wits about tonight," he said.

"Need it for Dutch courage," grunted John, before frowning. "Wait, I'm going?"

"Of course," said Sherlock, looking affronted. "Since when did you back off from danger?"

"I don't think the cloak can cover you and me."

"We'll be fine."

"What about the Muggle-repelling spells?"

"John, I'll be wearing a dressing gown sprayed with your blood, which is incidentally coursing through your veins. So no, I don't think you need to worry about Muggle-repelling spells."

"Right, stupid question," John sighed. "So when and how do we start?"

The two of them jumped that very moment when Mr. Shin literally materialized next to Sherlock's elbow. John checked the paper Godzilla, and, yes, it was still roaring around according to the other Mr. Shin's directions.

"This Doppelganger spell is really useful and really creepy," John declared.

"The proper name is *bunshin sool*," said Mr. Shin brusquely. "I am going to Hogwarts now. Follow me."

He strode away. Though Mr. Shin was more than a foot shorter than Sherlock, and five inches beneath John's zenith, they still had trouble catching up to his odd, bowlegged walk. John swore there was some kind of magic going on that was letting Mr. Shin powerwalk faster than an Olympian sprinter.

Mr. Shin led them to the door to Jason's greenhouse dedicated to growing grain. John braced for the sight of yards upon yards of wheat and rice fields, and still couldn't help but marvel at the magic. Mr. Shin marched up to the small barn in the center, which had operational chimney.

Mr. Shin stood abruptly in front of the large fireplace.

"Are your shoes silent?" he asked.

"They're both rubber-soled," Sherlock replied.

"Your anti-magic protection?"

"Made according to your daughter's instructions."

"How will you stay out of sight?"

"We have an invisibility cloak."

"I see you have a natural turn for this sort of thing," said Mr. Shin, now reaching for the brass pudding pot on the mantelpiece. "You must remain silent and follow me at all times. You *cannot* be caught; we are violating more laws than you can count. I'm only helping because it is unacceptable to leave the situation as is any longer. Now hold onto me. Floo is not known for its comfort or ease."

"How will we communicate to you?" asked John, grabbing the back panel of Mr. Shin's coat.

Mr. Shin took a pinch of glittery powder.

"Think loudly," he said. Then he threw the Floo-powder into the fire and cried: " *Hogwarts* !"

John and Sherlock stumbled out of a fireplace inside a large chamber. Sherlock looked disoriented, which was expected since it was the first time he'd traveled through the Floo-network and all the spinning and speeding pass hundreds of fireplaces had that kind of effect to first-time travelers. Nevertheless he recovered more quickly than John; he seized John's hand in the semi-darkness, pulled her swiftly to his side and flung the invisibility cloak over them while Mr. Shin calmly brushed the soot off his coat. Still holding John's hand in one of his, Sherlock followed after Mr. Shin as he left the chamber through the open door and entered a long hallway.

John tried very hard not to let her eyes wander. The hallways of Hogwarts were exactly as Harry had described on numerous occasions. The paintings were indeed moving, and few of the subjects followed them through several portraits to keep up with Mr. Shin's regal strides, pushing aside the actual occupants and staring. The suits of armor were there, and so were the ghosts, gliding eerily at a distance. The torches on the walls were burning low, and their

light lent long, gloomy shadows on the embedded columns and stone archways. The air was as frigid as one can expected of an old castle built of ancient stone, standing tall in the midst of a snow storm that battered its tall darkened windows.

Mr. Shin took a sharp turn and entered another corridor, broader and higher than the one they'd just left. At the end of the corridor were four people. John recognised Snape, in his usual black, and Dumbledore, resplendent in sweeping robes of midnight blue. McGonagall was standing next the headmaster, pale but stern in her robes of deep green. Lockhart was fidgeting a little apart from the group. He jumped when he noticed Mr. Shin's silent approach and tried to further straighten his Lilac-colored robes and matching hat.

Sherlock clutched John closer to his side as Mr. Shin came to a halt. They watched Dumbledore placed a hand over his heart and make a small bow.

"Grandmaster Shin," said Dumbledore.

"Headmaster Dumbledore," Mr. Shin returned, formally. "I come to see my daughter."

Lockhart stepped forward eagerly.

"The hospital wing is right here, Grandmaster Shin- please feel free…"

Mr. Shin and Dumbledore entered the Hospital wing. Lockhart, looking excited and important, hurried after Dumbledore; so did Professor McGonagall and Snape. Sherlock and John noiselessly followed just as the door started to close.

John silently surveyed the chamber. There were series of beds with white sheets, and privacy screens on standby for each, except the ones that were drawn around the beds. A large iron chandelier was hanging off the highest point of the arched ceiling, and the candles there were burning brightly. A middle-aged woman wearing a pink cardigan over brown robes and white apron came out of an office- the long-suffering and sainted Madam Pomfrey, John figured, putting a mental note to send her a long thank-you letter and an

elaborate bouquet at the next opportunity. Madam Pomfrey led them to a screened bed at the far end, and drew the curtains away so Mr. Shin could enter.

The first thing that struck John was how *frozen* Jacqueline looked, how pale and still, with her eyes wide-open and face set in an expression of polite surprise. The expression grated John a bit-if there ever was a time Jacqueline, who could beat Sherlock in imitating a porcelain doll if she was so inclined, should show obvious signs of shock, it would be caught indirectly staring at the eyes of fifty foot long Basilisk.

Mr. Shin ran a thumb down her cheek, his face like a carved mask.

"Completely petrified," he muttered. Then in his native tongue he said something harsh and mournful. John, who'd been stationed at his homeland for about two years, got the gist of it: *why must you worry me so, you silly girl…*

"I remember something very similar happening in Ouagadogou," piped Lockhart, "a series of attacks, the full story is in my autobiography; I was able to provide the townsfolk with various amulets, which cleared the matter up at once… Of course, the petrified victims had to be cured separately…"

Mr. Shin ignored him. "What is being done?"

"We are waiting for the Mandrakes Professor Sprout had procured to mature so we can brew the Mandrake Restorative Draught," said Dumbledore calmly. "She has informed me that they're turning moody and secretive, so they are fast leaving childhood."

Mr. Shin's expression only darkened. "You have no mature specimens?"

"We always start with seedlings in the beginning of our fall term."

Mr. Shin sighed. "I shall ask my son Jason if he has more mature specimens. He has been scattering the planting times to ensure the medicinal plants are always available."

"Thank you," said Dumbledore. "This is wonderful news. The sooner

we can restore our victims, the better."

"I'll make the Restorative," Lockhart butted in. "I must have done it a hundred times. I could whip up a Mandrake Restorative Draught in my sleep-"

"Excuse me," said Snape icily. "But I believe I am the Potions master at this school."

There was a very awkward pause.

"What else do you need?" asked Mr. Shin quietly, his eyes burning dark.

"A way to find out how the attacks are taking place," said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling brightly.

Mr. Shin fell into a brief introspective silence, as though he was seriously considering the request.

"You don't recognise my methods," said Mr. Shin. "Will you still allow me, despite knowing this, to conduct a search through the school?"

"Absolutely."

Mr. Shin bowed. "You are too kind."

"No," said Dumbledore, beaming, "I'm *fascinated* ."

Mr. Shin gracefully rose to his feet and walked towards the exit. As he did so, he flicked back his coat, and what looked like hundreds of glass rose petals flew out from its folds. They fluttered in the air like so many snowflakes for a few seconds before they froze, crumpled into themselves and shot out the Hospital Wing looking like a phalanx of falcons when Mr. Shin opened the door.

"I may speak to some of the students," said Mr. Shin, pausing dramatically at the threshold with the door held open (so Sherlock and John can leave) to address the stunned teachers standing behind him. "Beware: I will not be kind."

Then he left. John felt Sherlock rumbling with silent laughter as they

waited for Mr. Shin to walk pass.

"Western magic users love theatrics," said Mr. Shin as he walked ahead. "Give them a show of your power and you can get away with much."

So the petals were all for show? John thought. If it was, it was mighty impressive one.

"They do serve a purpose beyond dramatics," said Mr. Shin, replying to the thought. "You shall see."

He marched on. Mr. Shin seemed to know the layout of the castle. Twice Mr. Shin led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed more staircases, and John was just wondering how much farther they had to go when they came to a sudden halt. John looked around, and saw nothing but an empty corridor with coats of armor here and there. But Mr. Shin was staring at a spot like there was something there-something invisible.

"Show yourself, Poltergeist!" he commanded.

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered. Mr. Shin's eyes narrowed.

"Do you want me to banish you?"

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross-legged in the air.

"Oooooooh!" he said, with an evil cackle, "Sickly Little Jackie's Daddy! What fun!"

"You must be Peeves."

"That's me!" said Peeves, wiggling his curly-toed feet. "Peeves, I am, I am Peeves!" Then he broke into song:

" *Sickly Little Squib Jackie,*

always falling over and wacky

can't even do magic, no she cannot,

Sickly Little Squib Jackie… "

Mr. Shin's unamused look could've halted a Dragon on a rampage.

"So you *do* wish to get banished," he said quietly.

Peeves paid no attention to Mr. Shin's words, except to blow a loud wet raspberry.

Mr. Shin put his hand into his inner coat pocket, pulled out a blood-red paper talisman about the size and shape of a playing card, and tossed it into the air. The talisman stopped about a foot from Mr. Shin's hand and its black symbols glowed gold. The wicked grin on Peeves' face fell off as he desperately tried to get away from the paper talisman that started sucking him in like a localized black hole, but his efforts were in vain. John felt a chill as Peeves, inexorably caught in the talisman's power, rattled the corridor with his screaming until he was completely absorbed inside the talisman.

Mr. Shin caught the talisman mid-air as it fluttered towards the floor, no longer glowing gold.

"I ought to burn this and destroy you completely," said Mr. Shin, addressing the silent red talisman, "A fitting end to one who persecutes my poor daughter as a Squib when she is not."

The talisman said nothing. Mr. Shin sniffed and put the talisman back into his inner coat pocket. Then he resumed his trek down the corridor. Sherlock and John followed him, John thinking (quietly, she hoped) Jack wasn't joking when she said threatening Shin June Hu's family could literally be last thing you do.

They stopped at the very end of the corridor, where a portrait of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress hung.

"Password?" she said.

"Wattlebird," said Mr. Shin, and the portrait swung forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They climbed over hole and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full

of squashy armchairs. Ron and Ginny were lounging on the armchairs close to the fire, roasting marshmallows.

"Grandmaster Shin!" said Ron breathlessly, jumping to his feet.

Mr. Shin acknowledged him with a raised hand.

"You may reveal yourselves," he said.

Sherlock flung off the invisibility cloak immediately. John picked it up and rolled it around an arm.

"Remember, no traumatizing children-" John started, but Sherlock was already on the move.

" *Ginerva Weasley* !" growled Sherlock, marching towards Ginny, who was shocked still at his unexpected appearence. "I know what you found, what you did and what you failed to tell Dumbledore! Now speak up before it's too late!"

Ginny went white. Then she drew a great, shuddering gasp, and tears began to pour down her face.

"I d-didn't *know*," sobbed Ginny. "I found it inside one of the books Mum got me. I th-thought someone had just left it in there and forgotten about it. I didn't think-"

"What are you talking about?" asked Ron, alarmed.

"A d-diary," Ginny sobbed. "I-I found a diary in my t-transfiguration book. I've b-been writing in it, and t-the boy who owned it before's been w-writing back to me… I - I s-swear I d-didn't mean to - I-I thought h-he was nice, b-but then he started to t-take me over - and - and-"

"Where is it?" Sherlock demanded, "Where did you put it?"

" *I threw it away* !" Ginny wailed. "I chucked it down Moaning Myrtle's toilet!"

John pushed Sherlock out of the way and held Ginny close. Ginny buried her face into the jumper and soaked it with her tears. John

rubbed the back of her head, murmuring assurances before glaring at the idiot.

"What d'you do that for?" John hissed. "I thought we agreed Ginny was just a carrier!"

"We did. I just wanted her to confess quickly," said Sherlock, smiling and unrepentant.

John wanted to punch him, but had an armful of shaking and weeping Ginny to hold. Not hindered by such things, Mr. Shin went ahead and left Sherlock sprawling.

"God forbid you ever have daughters!" he thundered. "Your disregard of the human heart shall be your downfall!"

Sherlock got up unsteadily, clutching his jaw. "Well, that was…"

Mr. Shin raised his fist again, and Sherlock shut up, surprising John more than a little.

"You have no idea what she had to contend with-none at all!" barked Mr. Shin. Then he knelt before Ginny, and said gently, "You are a very brave girl. Not many would've done as well as you. Yes," he said when Ginny peered at him through tear-filled eyes. "I know *what* had enchanted you. And heaven help the man who so blithely used it on you."

"So what is it, this dairy?" asked John. "What happened to Ginny sounds a lot like possession."

Mr. Shin sighed.

"I envy western magic people. Even their evils are less harmful than the things I had to face as a boy. For you, wands are benign things, eager to help you. For me, wands are dangerous things, ready to possess you, take you over at the slightest weakness."

"So it's a type of blood wand?" asked Ron apprehensively.

"If only," said Mr. Shin mournfully. "One uses human blood, dragon heartstrings, unicorn hairs and phoenix feathers for wand cores

because they are powerful magical substances capable of channeling magic. *All* of them have the capacity to overtake you, but never will because they neither have the power nor will to do it. However, there exists something far more powerful than all of these and thoroughly able to turn you into a puppet."

"Which is?"

"A soul," said Mr. Shin, "a soul of a human-being."

Mr. Shin turned his back on Ron and Sherlock, who were utterly shocked. John held the shaking Ginny more tightly.

"When I was nine years old, my adoptive father, who was one of the five leaders of my country's magic community, tried to use me to create a soul wand," said Mr. Shin tonelessly. "He selected me specifically; I manifested magic since the womb, and was hailed a prodigy since I was a hundred days old. He took me away from my birth father, after convincing him that I needed special care and upbringing. I was thus raised like a lamb for slaughter, calling the thief who stole me 'father', while my real father watched me grow up from a distance. The day I learned the truth was the day my real father sacrificed his own life to save mine." He closed his eyes briefly. "I later learned I was one of the hundreds who were so selected and their souls locked into objects to be used as wands. Since then I made it my mission to destroy all soul wands to set free the captive souls within. I destroyed many national treasures in the process."

"So that's why you were kicked out of your country," said Ron in awed voice. "Dad wondered about that a lot."

"There is nothing you can pay in exchange of a soul," said Mr. Shin flatly, " *nothing* . I have said this then, and I will say this now. I care not how historically significant or valuable an object is-if it was created at the expense of a person's soul, I *will* destroy it."

There was moment of silence after this pronouncement.

"We need to question Myrtle," said Sherlock, much subdued. "You know the proper way to ask questions to a ghost, yes?"

Ron nodded. "Ask how she died first."

"Find out who picked up the diary. When did you throw it away, Ginny?"

"The first week of December," answered Ginny tremulously. "Wednesday, I think."

"It took about a month for the new owner to fall under the diary's control," muttered Sherlock. "You said the old diary's owner wrote back to you. What is his name?"

"T-Tom," whispered Ginny. "Tom Riddle."

"Tom Riddle?" repeated Ron, taken aback. "But he was the one who banished the Basilisk the last time!"

"What does this mean?" said John. "Did the Heir of Slytherin make a soul wand out of Tom Riddle in revenge? And if Tom's soul is the one orchestrating the attacks, why is he working *for* the Heir of Slytherin now?"

"Interesting questions, but not important right now," said Sherlock, his impatience returning. "We need to find the new keeper of the dairy. This new keeper doesn't know anything about Jacqueline or Tom wouldn't have picked her as the third victim. Tom would only have the new keeper as his source of information, correct?"

"Correct," said Mr. Shin.

"How many people know Jacqueline is a witch?" asked Sherlock.

"Dunno," said Ron. "About thirty people take music lessons, and they'd've seen her use the duplication spell at least once. They would've told their friends about it."

"But there is a rumour that she is a Squib," said John. "Peeves called her one. So it may not be public knowledge."

A clock chimed.

"We must leave," said Mr. Shin. "Get under the cloak. I must tell

Dumbledore what he's dealing with."

He clapped once. Two glass falcons circled around Ron and Ginny and landed on their outstretched hands.

"These are my sentries," he told them. "When you find the diary, they will alert me. If the dairy puts you in danger, others just like them will come and help you."

" *Cool*," said Ron, staring at the tiny falcon.

"Shouldn't Harry, Hermione and Julia get one, too?" asked John from under the cloak.

"I already gave Julia five and I will give Harry two when we return to Greg's flat," said Mr. Shin. "Now *silence* ."

John and Sherlock kept quiet all the way back to the Hospital Wing. Mr. Shin told Dumbledore he detected the presence of a soul wand- or something very much like one, he wasn't sure if westerners had the knowledge to create such a dastardly object, as they were more enthusiastic about destroying references to creating such things-but he didn't know where it was or who had it.

"Sorry I cannot help you more," said Mr. Shin.

"No," said Dumbledore. "You have answered many questions I had for a long time. Thank you, Grandmaster."

Mr. Shin turned to leave. The other teachers hovered too closely around him for Sherlock and John to get close enough to grab hold of his coat. Also, a rheumatic and hunchbacked old man who had pale eyes, jowls that quivered and thin grey hair, wearing a brown coat, stood in attention next to the fireplace. Dumbledore just hung back, looking mischievous, which made John wonder how they were going to leave without being detected.

Mr. Shin calmly turned to the old man by the fireplace.

"Are you Argus Filch?" asked Mr. Shin politely.

"Yes," grunted Filch. John smiled; so this was frequently maligned

caretaker of Hogwarts.

"My sincere thanks for helping my daughter," said Mr. Shin. He put his hand into his coat, and pulled out a blood-red card. "Please take this."

Filch took the talisman looking bewildered and deeply suspicious, like he was sure he being made fun of. Mr. Shin lightly tapped the card in his hand.

There was a pop like an opening beer bottle, and Peeves sprang out of the card. The poltergeist zoomed away, screaming and quivering with genuine fear.

"A talisman that captures spirits and locks them inside," said Mr. Shin calmly to the gaping Filch. "It also captures poltergeists. I thought you might like it."

The grin that spread across Filch's face was positively demonic. Sherlock smothered John under his arm to stifle John's uncontrollable sniggering.

"PEEVES!" Filch roared, waving the red talisman like a sword. "I'll have you this time, I'll have you!"

And without a backward glance, Filch ran flat-footed from the Hospital Wing. The teachers jumped out the way as he rushed out. During the distraction, Sherlock tightened his grip around John, quickly navigated the two of them to Mr. Shin and seized the hem of his coat.

A brief smile appeared on Mr. Shin's face.

"Merry Christmas," he said, and then he tossed the Floo-powder into the roaring fireplace and vanished.

John, Sherlock and Mr. Shin returned to Lestrade's flat about two hours after they'd left it. No one remarked upon their absence, and John instantly knew why: Mr. Shin's doppelgänger was sitting dourly next to an illusion of John dozing against a deeply uncomfortable-

looking Sherlock. The latter scene was not an uncommon one, and the others in the flat were giving them a wide berth so as to not interrupt illusion-John's nap and enjoy the sight of illusion-Sherlock in obvious discomfort.

"May you have many sons just like you," Mr. Shin muttered in his native tongue as he discreetly banished the illusion and doppelgänger once the three of them took their place.

"If that's an actual curse, please don't," pleaded John after making a show of waking with a start, "I'm going to be their Mum."

Mr. Shin put on a deeply unhappy face as he said something else in his native language. John didn't understand the phrasing, but was pretty sure 'why', 'married' and 'him' were in there somewhere. So John twirled a finger in a circular motion next to her ear and shrugged helplessly, which made Sherlock put on his kicked-puppy face. Mr. Shin patted John's arm sympathetically. Then he walked away, calling John a kindhearted idiot. It was possibly the nicest and most honest thing anyone said to John after they experienced the full brunt of Sherlock Holmes.

Lestrade took Mr. Shin's vacated spot shortly after this, trying but failing to swat Sherlock out of the way.

"You understand what my father-in-law is saying?" Lestrade whispered furtively after he gave up.

"Sort of," said John. "Why?"

"There's something I've been wondering for a while," said Lestrade, nervously checking to see if Mr. Shin was beyond earshot. "He keeps saying this phrase when I pick up Julia. Jack won't translate it, Julia doesn't understand, and Jeremy and Jason keeps telling me I'm happy not knowing." He scowled. "But I want to know."

John was definitely curious. Lestrade took out the recorder inside his pocket and played it. John was overcome by giggles as soon as Mr. Shin's recorded voice finished grumbling.

"He's calling me a brainless twat, isn't he?" said Lestrade, staring at

John, who doubled over. "I knew it."

"No, no," gasped John, "He actually-ohmygosh," the giggles just wouldn't stop, "no wonder even Jeremy couldn't spit it out!"

" *John*," said Sherlock reproachfully while Lestrade hissed. " *Just tell me!* "

"Okay, okay," said John, breathing deeply to stop the giggles. Once they were under control, John told them: "He's basically wondering why Julia didn't take after her nice and handsome father and more after his stupid and violent daughter."

The look on Lestrade's face was priceless.

" *Shut up*," said Lestrade, completely flustered. "You're having me on!"

"Nope. I'm not lying," said John, hand up, "Soldier's honour."

Before Lestrade could deny again, Mr. Shin briefly stole a look at their direction. Then he reached out and patted Julia's head, saying the exact same thing Lestrade recorded on tape in a rather loud voice. Jeremy and Jason kept their faces straight with practiced ease and pointedly refused to look at their father's direction.

John and Sherlock laughed at the look of rising horror on Lestrade's face. Sometimes it was nice to have your perception of a person completely flipped over like a crepe.

Final Notes : Thus ends Sherlock and John's first trip to Hogwarts. ;-) Can you guess who has TMR's dairy now?

A Scandal in Hogwarts

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Seven: A Scandal in Hogwarts

The morning after Boxing Day, Severus found himself once again ensconced in 221B Baker Street. Holmes said that they should get a chair just for him, seeing as he kept coming back, and Watson provided the hot beverages.

"So what's up?" asked Watson, taking a seat.

"Grandmaster Shin has taken personal interest in the attacks," Severus started sombrely. "It was only a matter of time, of course, seeing as his daughter was the last victim. While his involvement is by no means unwelcome, it does put a wedge in your involvement."

"A rather important figure, I take it?"

"Quite," said Severus. "Shin June Hu is the current head of the Department of Mysteries, and-"

There was an interruption in the form of a small boy, barefoot and pyjama-clad, who appeared in the kitchen and let out a small squeak. Severus savoured the look of outright horror on his face until he turned around and went back into the hallway, muttering he was clearly having a nightmare and needed to go back to bed.

"We had a conversation about this, Snape," Watson sighed.

"Did you hear me say anything?" drawled Severus.

"You didn't have to," Watson retorted. "That was textbook reaction of a kid who had too many bad experiences with you."

Severus smirked at the (accurate) accusation.

"As I was saying, Shin June Hu is the current head of the Department of Mysteries, and a prominent man amongst our kind. Personally, I believe his magical talent outstrips even Dumbledore, and would've been acknowledged as such had he not been such a reclusive figure."

Holmes whistled, "Better than even Dumbledore, you say? Why do you think so?"

"Three points," said Severus. "First, their education: Dumbledore followed the traditional route, excelling in everything he did and winning every academic award available during his seven years at Hogwarts. As for Shin June Hu, the story goes that he showed up in Hogwarts forty years ago requesting distance education. Dumbledore was headmaster at the time, and after learning Shin was raised in a country that didn't have a formal magic education system, he granted his request. Shin then proceeded to make a mockery of the seven year curriculum by mastering the entire course load in two years-taking his OWLs after a year, and his NEWTs in the next. He achieved Outstandings for all the subjects he took for both exams."

"How old was he when this happened?" asked Watson, amazed.

"I don't know. In his thirties, perhaps? Anyway, my head of house loved to brag how he gave Shin a leg up into the Ministry after he sat through his NEWTs-as if ever needed it. He started in Magical Law Enforcement before moving to the Department of Mysteries, where he rose through the ranks until he was named department head. This leads me my second point: Rumour has it the Dark Lord tried to recruit him, and Shin's response was: ' *Begone, or I will take away the magic of your follower's children and then take away*

yours. ' Clearly he wasn't breathing hot air, because the Dark Lord placed a flee-on-sight command on Shin to his followers shortly afterwards."

"And he did all this while he was a lecturer at Queens' College," muttered Watson.

"Excuse me?" said Severus, frowning.

"Jack is my friend," said Watson simply. "Until this year, I thought her Dad was just a professor at Cambridge."

Severus stared at Watson. "I see. But that only reinforces the fact he is a profoundly brilliant man."

"Never doubted that," sniffed Holmes. "Your third point?"

"He can do most spells without a wand, a feat hitherto thought as impossible for a witch or a wizard," said Severus. "Hence, he is called the *Grandmaster* ."

Watson briefly held a slightly dazed look.

"Sorry, just had a random thought. When Dr. Shin has breakfast in the dining hall with his fellows in Cambridge, what is he thinking when they warble on about how the world consists of nothing but matter, with the laws of nature and evolution to arrange them? Is he thinking he can instantly break every natural law known to man and devolve them into amoebas?"

Both Severus and Holmes snorted into their cups.

"No wonder he perfected his poker face!" Watson chortled. "Do you think he gives into temptation sometimes, turning them into Galapagos Finches and locking them up in their offices?"

Holmes laughed outright. Severus dropped his face into his hand and snickered.

"Okay, now I am seriously fighting an urge to shadow him to see if he does," said Watson, grinning.

"… Enough, Watson," said Severus, trying to sound serious. "The point is: if Grandmaster Shin gets involved, there's no way the Ministry of Magic wouldn't."

"We are a security risk to you," Holmes deduced correctly. "Whether we are helpful or not doesn't matter. The mere fact that we are non-magical means the Ministry is more inclined to erase our memories than risk disclosure."

Severus nodded. "I would not be surprised if the Minister of Magic is meeting Dumbledore even as I speak."

Holmes ran his fingers over this lower lip thoughtfully.

"This can't be the only reason why you're here. A brief text exchange would've been enough to relay all this information."

"Maybe he wanted to hang out a bit afterwards?" said Watson.

Both Severus and Holmes scoffed at the suggestion.

"As it happens, Holmes you're quite correct," said Severus. "Ron and Ginny Weasley were found petrified nearby the wall the Heir of Slytherin left his message yesterday evening. Mr. Weasley was found holding Mr. Watson's phone."

Severus placed the device on the table. Holmes took it wordlessly. Watson's knuckles were white around the mug.

"Be glad you're even getting it back," said Severus. "Lucius Malfoy has more than once complained we are not as strict about enforcing the no mobile phone rule in Hogwarts as we ought. This is your final warning. Do not give Mr. Watson a phone, or he may be expelled for gross violations against the Statute of Secrecy."

There was the most disquieting silence.

"Lucius Malfoy is one of the school governors," said Holmes. It was not a question.

"Yes," Severus confirmed.

"And his son is staying at school for Christmas."

"Correct."

Silence.

Then Holmes slowly put up the most brutal-looking smile on his face.

"He feels threatened. The Weasleys are a pure-blood family; eccentric and controversial because Arthur Weasley is fascinated by non-magical people, but pure-blood nevertheless. This last attack betrays the fact the agent is no longer acting strictly according to the pure-blood supremacy agenda. In fact-" the brutal smile grew wider "-it's clear the agent is acting erratically. The last attack is a blind lashing out. Why? Because it knows it is a matter of time before it is caught. The Howler we sent would've been made our close involvement in Harry's school affairs and the fact I'm not a brainless Muggle clear. Banning mobile phones in Hogwarts is Malfoy's attempt to placate the agent. He might even feel audacious enough to use the last attack to remove Dumbledore from his post, but unless the beast is captured, this is doubtful; after all, there is no guarantee his manoeuvre will actually calm down the agent. Better keep Dumbledore around in case the agent goes into rampage and ensure his son is protected."

Holmes nailed Severus with his pale eyes.

"And which side would you be?"

"My own," Severus said without blinking or missing a beat.

"That's half the truth," said Holmes. "You have your own agenda, and it requires you to maintain working relations to both the pure-blood supremacy camp and the more the 'enlightened' blood-agnostic camp. All things being equal, you would favour those who advocate magical supremacy, which is more in line with the pure-blood agenda, but you're not above using the likes of us."

Severus merely raised an eyebrow. Holmes smirked in return.

"What a waste," he said. Then Holmes picked up his violin and

started playing Wagner by the window.

"Thank you for the tea," said Severus, rising.

"You're welcome," Watson replied, picking up the empty mugs.

Severus opened the sitting room door. He suppressed a start at the sight of Potter sitting on the middle step of the stairway leading to the second floor, still in his pyjamas and wearing a pale green bathrobe and slippers.

"Eavesdropping?" Severus sneered.

Potter just looked at him through glassy eyes uncovered by glasses. Severus was the one to turn away first.

"Stop it, Snape, seriously," Watson growled behind him. Then passing by Severus, Watson walked over to Potter, sat next to the boy and wrapped an arm around him.

The last thing Severus saw before he Apparated was Watson planting a kiss on the top of Potter's head, who buried his face in Watson's bosom, clutching at the jumper like a frightened child.

The remaining three Weasley children in Hogwarts were very subdued over the last stretch of Christmas holidays. Even Fred and George Weasley remained in their state of stunned silence since they'd learned their youngest brother and only sister had been petrified. Severus tried not to make his (admittedly perverse) enjoyment of their misery-induced quiet show, and he'd succeeded to an extent. Nevertheless, he received several glares from a thin-lipped and pale McGonagall and one (terrifying) disappointed look from Dumbledore.

Grandmaster Shin paid a second visit after the New Years. He informed Dumbledore that his son Jason Shin had ten Mandrakes that were expected to start to try to move into each other pots by the end of January. That made Sprout and Pomfrey very happy and relieved.

"We'll be able to revive those poor people in the hospital wing two months earlier than expected," said Sprout. "Thank goodness for your son, sir."

Mr. Shin didn't share her joy, and closed his eyes as if in pain when Dumbledore informed him of the double attack.

"Forgive me," he said. "My sentries have failed to prevent the attack from happening. Will you let me see where the children were found, so I may understand how they failed?"

"Please," Dumbledore said, nodding sombrely.

Dumbledore, Severus and McGonagall lead him to the perennially out-of-order girls' toilet Ron and Ginny Weasley had been discovered. The door had a multitude of gouge marks Mr. Shin's glass falcon sentries had made in their effort to penetrate the door. Several falcons were still there, deeply embedded in the wood. Mr. Shin studied the mutilated door silently for a moment, before he held out a hand. A glass falcon removed itself from the door, glided over to the hand and landed on top of the outstretched palm.

Mr. Shin brought the falcon close to his face and stared at it intently for a full minute.

"The door was locked magically," said Mr. Shin at length. "It was done so after the children entered the toilet. Neither they nor my sentries were unable to undo the lock."

He entered the toilet. The Moaning Myrtle was crying, as usual, in her stall. Mr. Shin picked up a blood-soaked glass shard from the wet floor and studied it under the dim lights, facing the grimy and cracked mirrors.

"Only two sentries to fight for them," said Mr. Shin mournfully. "Who discovered the children?"

"Professor Lockhart," answered Dumbledore.

"Is he the blond-haired one I saw before?"

"Yes."

Mr. Shin frowned. "Where is he?"

"In the Hospital wing," McGonagall answered. "He was injured in his attempt to capture the Monster of Slytherin, which he claims to have discovered in the Forbidden Forest last night."

Mr. Shin's frown deepened. "Did he find the beast?"

"He brought back an Acromantula," said Dumbledore. "He left the body on the grounds for our examination."

"Why would Professor Lockhart think the Monster of Slytherin is a *spider* ?" asked Mr. Shin.

"He has brought to our attention that a student was expelled years ago for raising an Acromantula in Hogwarts, around the same time students were being attacked in the same fashion as they are now," said Dumbledore calmly. "He did not reveal his source of information, but it is true as far as the student's expulsion for the aforementioned charges are concerned."

"I see," said Mr. Shin, his expression completely unreadable. "May I see the beast?"

Dumbledore took him to the grounds immediate to the castle's main entrance door. Next to the stone steps was a huge black spider lying on its back, its eight hairy legs curled stiffly up in the air and eight eyes blank and staring. Mr. Shin unflinchingly touched the corpse and examined it.

"No marks," he said quietly.

"No indeed," agreed Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling again.

Mr. Shin clasped his hands behind his back.

"Quite a feat, to kill an Acromantula without leaving a single mark on its body," he said dryly. "I hope Professor Lockhart's injuries were not serious."

"Just cuts he presumably received from the terrific battle."

Mr. Shin sniffed. "Jason will deliver the Mandrakes as soon as they are ready for cutting. Have you informed Arthur Weasley?"

"Yes. His son Percy has also written to his mother."

Mr. Shin nodded.

"Thank you for everything, Headmaster. If any of the school governors raise issue over your leadership, I, for one, will put my word against it."

Dumbledore bowed. "Thank you."

That evening, Dumbledore, Severus and Hagrid were discussing the spider, when a portly man wearing a pinstriped suit, a scarlet tie, a long black cloak, and pointed purple boots entered the Headmaster's office. Under his arm he carried a lime-green bowler.

"Minister Fudge!" said Severus. "What brings you here?"

Dumbledore frowned. Hagrid went pale and sweaty. He dropped into one of chairs and looked from Dumbledore to Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic.

"Bad business," said Fudge in rather clipped tones, "Very bad business. Had to come. Four attacks, two of them not even Muggle-borns. Things've gone too far. Ministry's got to act."

"I never," said Hagrid, looking imploringly at Dumbledore. "You know I never, Professor Dumbledore, sir-"

"I want it understood, Cornelius, that Hagrid has my full confidence," said Dumbledore, frowning at Fudge.

"Look, Albus," said Fudge, uncomfortably. "Hagrid's record's against him. Ministry's got to do something. The school governors have been in touch-"

"Yet again, Cornelius, I tell you that taking Hagrid away will not help in the slightest," said Dumbledore, his blue eyes burning. "In fact, to act on his past record alone would be injustice; we now have evidence that indicate he had been wrongly accused the first time."

"Look at it from my point of view," said Fudge, fidgeting with his bowler. "I'm under a lot of pressure. Got to be seen to be doing something, and this evidence you told me about isn't panning out. We have to go by the record. If it turns out it wasn't Hagrid, he'll be back and no more said. But I've got to take him. Got to. Wouldn't be doing my duty-"

"Take me?" said Hagrid, who was trembling. "Take me where?"

"For a short stretch only," said Fudge, not meeting Hagrid's eyes. "Not a punishment, Hagrid, more a precaution. If someone else is caught, you'll be let out with a full apology-"

"Not Azkaban?" croaked Hagrid.

Before Fudge could answer, there was a loud rap on the door. On the next moment, Lucius Malfoy strode inside the office, swathed in a long black travelling cloak, smiling a cold and satisfied smile.

"Already here, Fudge," he said approvingly. "Good, good…"

"What're you doin' here?" said Hagrid furiously, rising to his feet.

"Surely it isn't unusual for a governor to visit the school when there is such a crisis at hand?" Lucius sneered. "I'm here to speak to Dumbledore."

"And what exactly did you want with me, Lucius?" said Dumbledore. He spoke politely, but the fire was still blazing in his blue eyes.

"Dreadful thing, Dumbledore," said Malfoy lazily, taking out a long roll of parchment, "but the governors feel it's time for you to step aside. This is an Order of Suspension - you'll find all twelve signatures on it. I'm afraid we feel you're losing your touch. How many attacks have there been now? Four in total, isn't it? At this rate, there'll be no students left at Hogwarts - completely unacceptable."

"Oh, now, see here, Lucius," said Fudge, looking alarmed, "Dumbledore suspended - no, no - last thing we want just now."

"The appointment- or suspension- of the headmaster is a matter for

the governors, Fudge," said Lucius Malfoy smoothly. "And as Dumbledore has failed to stop these attacks-"

Someone knocked on the door a second time. After a polite moment, Mr. Shin noiselessly walked in, looking saturnine and odd in his Muggle tweed suit and knitted waistcoat. Both Malfoy and Fudge started at the sight of him.

"Shin June Hu!" Fudge breathed, looking equal parts bewildered and shocked.

The only sign of Mr. Shin's acknowledgement was a short, morose look.

"Is this a bad time?" he asked in a mild tone. "I just wanted to speak to Headmaster Dumbledore about the sentries I left behind in the school. I can wait."

The victorious look on Malfoy completely vanished, leaving a bloodless countenance.

"You left sentries?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Shin in tone milder still. "I wanted to help."

Malfoy said nothing. Fudge, on the other hand, looked very excited.

"Why didn't you tell me this earlier? Could've saved me so much trouble-"

"No point giving you false hope," replied Mr. Shin. "For now, they are just keeping watch. They know *what* to look for. Once they find it, they will trace it back to the person who planted it or is using it."

He slowly looked up to the ceiling, his dark eyes seemingly swallowing up all light in its vicinity.

"And don't worry about delays," Mr. Shin murmured. "I've given them orders to remove the perpetrator's magic and remain on standby until the Ministry is ready to collect."

A terrifying silence descended upon the office as Mr. Shin's words

sank in.

"Now, now, Shin, don't be hasty," said Fudge, whose upper lip was sweating, "I know this is upsetting, but we don't want another repeat of the incident of 1962."

"Mmn," hummed Mr. Shin, nodding absently.

"I'm *serious*," said Fudge, getting more agitated. "We can't have a scandal like that again. Not when we have one brewing already. I know you had no direct hand in it, but-"

"I will do nothing Dumbledore disapproves," said Mr. Shin brusquely. "I trust his judgment as the Headmaster of Hogwarts."

"Oh. Well, um," Fudge stuttered. "That's good, that's very good, except-well, Malfoy here…"

"Yes?" said Mr. Shin politely, turning his gaze at Malfoy.

"I'm here to give an ultimatum," muttered Lucius, his voice not quite steady. "Dumbledore, you must put an end to these attacks soon or the order of suspension will be put in effect. You have a month."

"How very generous of you," Dumbledore said, not taking his bright blue eyes off Lucius's cold grey ones.

Malfoy quickly bowed himself out after this. Fudge, fiddling with his bowler, waited for Hagrid to go ahead of him, but Hagrid stood his ground. So Fudge went ahead, reluctantly, holding the door open and only then did Hagrid pull on his moleskin overcoat to follow after him.

"Fine, I'm comin'," he growled. "Someone'll need ter feed Fang while I'm away."

The door banged shut. Severus wouldn't stake his life on it, as he had been staring at the door, but he could've sworn he'd seen in his peripheral vision Dumbledore and Mr. Shin do a little fist bump.

The students returned as scheduled. The head of houses had the unhappy duty of informing their students of the new rules in place: All students will return to their House common rooms by six o'clock in the evening. No student is to leave the dormitories after that time. The students will be escorted to each lesson by a teacher. No student is to use the bathroom unaccompanied by a teacher. All further Quidditch training and matches are to be postponed. There will be no more evening activities.

Severus noticed quite a few of his own Slytherin students were perturbed that two Weasleys were petrified.

"They must have found out something," speculated Theodore Nott at the first potions lessons of the term. "I mean, they're pureblood. There can be no other reason."

"They're blood-traitors," said Draco scathingly. "That's as bad as being a Mudblood as far as I'm concerned."

Potter, who sitting behind Draco, bit the inside of his mouth but said nothing. His partner Hermione Granger, who exhibited all the signs and symptoms of crying herself to sleep on a daily basis, started tearing up.

"Dumbledore's not going to last as Headmaster after all this," said Draco, not bothering to keep his voice down. "Father thinks he's the worst headmaster the school's ever had, and I quite agree. Just you wait. Father's going to get rid of him and we'll get a decent headmaster. Someone who *won't* want the Chamber of Secrets closed…"

Severus swept towards Draco's workbench to quell the talking. The boy shut his mouth as he passed.

"I'm quite surprised the Mudbloods and blood-traitors haven't all packed their bags when they heard the news," Malfoy went on as soon as Severus reached the other side. "Bet you five Galleons the next one dies. Pity it wasn't Weasley-it's not like the lot doesn't have the children to spare."

Potter went white. Neville Longbottom and Granger grabbed hold of

his arms before he could do anything. Potter remained in his seat until the end of the class, even when Granger and Longbottom let go of their grips on him, but he was shaking so badly it was a wonder he managed to brew a passable solution. No doubt Granger was to blame for this anomaly.

"Five points from Gryffindor," said Severus, sneering at the vial Potter submitted. "Potter, I told you this should be an individual effort. And another five points for helping him, Miss Granger."

Potter's eyes flashed as he started to open his mouth, but Granger and Longbottom pulled him away forcefully before he could actually articulate anything, much to Severus' disappointment. So Severus just herded the second-years to Herbology after the bell.

The days went by like this. Nothing alarming happened to the students or the roosters during the interim, which made the more gullible/desperate part of the student body to believe in Lockhart's incessant boasting that he had vanquished Slytherin's monster over the holidays as a Christmas present to the school. The students who still had functioning brains inside their skulls remained sceptical as they rightfully should.

"But an Acromantula *can't* be the monster that's been carrying out the attacks," Granger argued loudly from the Gryffindor table one evening. "Acromantulas have deadly venom, but they don't have the power to *petrify*, and Colin, Miss Jackie, Ron and Ginny were *petrified*, not poisoned."

The more cunning students went beyond Granger's pedestrian reasoning and figured out all the victims were associated with Potter. Once this bit of reasoning got out, many students started to avoid Potter like a disease carrier. Oddly enough, this triggered several Hufflepuffs to publically announce their support of Harry Potter, Ernie Macmillan and Justin Finch-Fletchley among the first. Potter didn't comment on either of these movements. In fact, Potter rarely spoke since the end of Christmas Holidays. Severus knew Potter's silence had little to do with feeling distraught over his petrified friends, as his more sentimental and soft-hearted colleagues thought, but because he was *scheming* . Staffroom gossip, Potter and his lackeys' behaviour made this blatantly

obvious.

The problem was Severus has no idea what he was up to.

Severus could see no reason why Longbottom would want to study the properties of Floo powder and learn how to raise a Floo plant, but that was precisely what he was doing, according to Sprout. Nor could he see why Potter was questioning McGonagall over sculpturing and glass-shaping spells. Flitwick mentioned one afternoon he had his brains picked clean by Hermione Granger and Julia Lestrade on how to dynamically alter the target of a Holography charm. Finally, Lockhart brought forth the most bewildering piece of information regarding their activities.

"Harry Potter wanted a blow-by-blow account on how I defeated Slytherin's Monster!" Lockhart gloated as soon as he entered the staff room. "I'm sorry to say I couldn't tell him much. I'm writing the whole account for my newest book and I'm under contract to keep all the details secret until it's published. No title yet, but it promises to be my best selling book yet! I promised him a pre-release copy and that seem to make him happy… I can send signed copies to anyone else who's interested!"

Everyone turned their face determinately away. Unperturbed or simply unaware, Lockhart chuckled to himself.

"I'll make a fine wizard out of him yet!" Lockhart went on. "He was so eager to learn the full extent of my expertise in fighting the Dark Arts. He was completely struck dumb when I told him my mastery in memory charms. Useful things, memory charms." Another hearty chuckle, "Harry, you little scallywag! Took him a long time to warm up to me, but he did pay his respects in the end."

Clearly Potter had used a hitherto unheard of bit of cunning to glean info out of Lockhart without him noticing. Not that it was difficult, Severus thought waspishly. Lockhart would autograph anything that stood still long enough and blather at the slightest hint of an audience. But Lockhart's account of the exchange didn't help Severus figure out what Potter was scheming. The collective body of evidence had no apparent coherent story. Usually this meant Severus would have to resort to Legilimency, but therein lay the

most troubling problem of them all: whenever Severus attempted to delve into Potter's (simpleton) mind, all he saw were sluggish grey swirls and images so distorted, interpretation was impossible.

And that, simply, was unacceptable.

A wizard skilled in Occlumency would've simply left his mind clear or place a partial truth for a Legilimens to view, but it was extremely unlikely Potter knew existence of Occlumency. Even if he did (very doubtful), what Severus witnessed every time he delved into Potter's mind was unlike anything he'd seen or read. A natural Occlumens was an oxymoron-it was the same as saying there exists people who naturally didn't have emotions or thoughts-but what he saw inside Potter's (plebeian) brain made him wonder…

At last, unable to take it anymore, Severus raised the question to Dumbledore.

"Have you ever attempted to use Legilimency on Dr. Watson?" asked Dumbledore in return.

"No," said Severus, "Is this significant?"

"Quite," said Dumbledore. "As you know, I asked Sherlock and John how Harry ended in their care on the day of their Hogwarts interview. After providing a brief summary of Sherlock's fight against Jim Moriarty, John told me, I quote: 'Sherlock finally got the upper hand on Moriarty. We had to do mad crazy things to get there. You don't want to know what we had to do. But getting married was one of them.'"

Dumbledore laughed quietly at Severus' sputtering disbelief.

"Naturally, I wanted to know the details of the 'mad crazy things' they had done," Dumbledore continued. "Seeing as neither John nor Sherlock were inclined to go over them, I attempted to view their memories. Sherlock, as you no doubt experienced, thought too much too quickly for me to follow. John I could glean nothing for there was nothing at all for me to see."

" *Nothing* ?"

"Nothing," confirmed Dumbledore. "It was as if I was seeing a person without the benefit of mind-reading spells at all."

Severus wet his lips. "And you are certain-absolutely certain-Watson is a Muggle."

"As sure as the Headmaster of Hogwarts can ever be," Dumbledore replied. "I have not completely removed the possibility of late-blooming magic talent, but even a cursory examination of John's ability to *repel* magic and impart that ability to objects long kept strongly suggests John is neither ordinary Muggle nor ordinary witch."

Dumbledore laced his fingers and regarded the spot above Severus thoughtfully.

"The only hint towards an explanation is this: Last year when Quirrell stunned Harry and petrified Neville, then left them to die in the chamber that held Hagrid's - *ahem* - three-headed pet dog, both regained their consciousness and mobility after a few minutes." Dumbledore looked Severus piercingly. "You know as well as I do that spells of this sort remain in effect until a counter is performed or the caster dies."

"So Watson not only has the ability to *repel* magic, but *drain it out* ?" asked Severus sharply.

"It would seem so. One can image the kind of interference we face when we attempt *Legilimens*, which is a fragile spell to begin with, on a person who can repel magic and drain out its effects."

"But if this is the case, why is Potter not drained of his magic to the point of turning into a Squib?" Severus argued. "No one in the wizard world is more exposed to John Watson than him-he is literally surrounded and clothed with Watson's touch! You and I meet Watson on a near weekly basis, and neither of us experienced any ill effects."

"Yes, that's the problem, isn't it?" said Dumbledore. "Perhaps we should cease to think in terms of draining and repelling, but think, as Jacqueline once speculated, ' *John makes Magic bow down and*

submit '."

"You've been discussing this with *Ms. Shin* ?" demanded Severus, feeling insulted.

"It came up when Jacqueline brought me her proposal to create an electric generator," said Dumbledore, blue eyes twinkling. "Repelling stray magic *is* a vital part of the design."

"… I suppose," said Severus stiffly, still miffed at Dumbledore for discussing such important matters to a talentless witch like Ms. Shin. "So you suggested she use Watson's influence?"

"She actually came up with the idea herself. Lack of Hogwarts education and feeble magic aside, she is very bright."

Severus sneered at the idea.

"By the by," said Dumbledore. "Why are you so intent on delving into Harry's mind? He has not, as far as I know, done anything to warrant your suspicion."

Severus didn't say Potter had a special reservation of his suspicion over all things going wrong for perpetuity, because Dumbledore already knew it to be the case.

"You could just *ask*, you know," Dumbledore chided.

"You think I haven't?" Severus hissed.

"Severus, breathing down a poor student's neck and accusing him of arrogance and presumption for even *thinking* he has the power to solve our current situation is *not* what I call 'asking'."

Severus quickly turned away to glower at Armando Dippet's portrait. Just because he had to hear Dumbledore sighing in exasperation didn't mean he had to see the look that accompanied it.

"Since it is bothering you so, I'll take the liberty of informing you what I *suspect* Harry is doing. He and his friends are in the process of developing the first Magical Mobile Phone."

Severus turned to stare at Dumbledore. Dumbledore looked calmly back.

"In case you have forgotten, Headmaster," said Severus slowly, as though he was speaking to a very dim-witted child or an infantile madman, "All attempts of replicating mobile phones have been spectacularly unsuccessful. Potter has barely over-average talent and knowledge. Granger may have the brains, but not the knowledge. Including Longbottom and Lestrade into the mix is just *asking* for failure."

"You're too hard on them," said Dumbledore. "Miss Granger *is* the brightest student we've seen in years. Filius and Minerva are one accord when it comes to Harry's spell-casting ability. Neville is the best Herbologist of his year and you yourself acknowledged Miss Lestrade is the best potioneer you've seen in decades."

"That doesn't translate to them knowing what they're doing!" Severus hissed. "I can't believe you're just leaving them without the benefit of guidance and mentorship!"

"Oh, they do have guidance."

"Yours?"

"Not mine," Dumbledore smiled, "Jacqueline's."

Severus would've sat down had he not been seated already.

"Ms. Jacqueline is currently in the Hospital Wing, *petrified.* "

"So she is."

"Then why are you saying she is guiding them?"

"She left notes," said Dumbledore, "quite a lot of them, in fact. From what I can tell, Jacqueline had finished laying out the magical mobile network's infrastructure and only needed to make the phone equivalent by the time she was petrified."

"Which is challenging enough as it is!" said Severus furiously. "How can you be sure Ms. Shin created something that actually *works,*

when wizards and witches far more learned and talented than her almost got themselves *killed* trying to replicate those wretched things without any success?"

"Why, Severus, are you implying that you care?" asked Dumbledore seriously.

"I refuse to be held accountable if and when Grandmaster Shin learns first and second year brats have stolen his daughter's notes of idle speculation and made a mess out of them!" Severus snarled. "The man has the temper of a sleeping Dragon, you know that!"

"I know enough about it to know not tickle it. But again, you overestimate the danger. Miss Lestrade is Grandmaster Shin's granddaughter; as such, she has his favour. Also, unlike the witches and wizards who attempted it before, Jacqueline actually *knows* the inner workings of Muggle mobile phones and mobile networks. That gives her an edge over her magic-only counterparts."

"How can that knowledge help when she doesn't have the magic to do anything about it?" Severus scoffed.

Dumbledore sighed, "So determined to disbelieve. Severus, how can you be so, when you complained ever so often how others constantly overlook you because you lacked the palatable trappings of talent?"

Severus opened his mouth to retort when the door to the office banged open, and McGonagall appeared.

"It has happened," she told them. "A student has been taken by the monster. Right into the Chamber itself."

Dumbledore stood up, his eyes blazing. Severus gripped his armrest very hard and said, "How can you be sure?"

"The Heir of Slytherin," said McGonagall, who was very white, "left another message. Right underneath the first one. *Her skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever* ."

"Who is it?" asked Dumbledore, "Which student?"

"Hermione Granger," said McGonagall.

Dumbledore quickly navigated around his desk and started running. McGonagall and Severus followed after him.

"Have you announced to the students to return to their House dormitories?" asked Dumbledore.

"Yes," said McGonagall, puffing after him. "Everyone else should be waiting at the staff room."

"Excellent, now-"

" *Professor Dumbledore!* "

The three of them skidded to a halt at the sound of Potter's shout. Potter and Julia Lestrade came running to their direction from an empty corridor.

"Harry and Julia, I do believe we told you to return to your House dormitories," said Dumbledore.

"It's okay, we're just copies," said Potter breathlessly.

" *Copies* ?" McGonagall blurted, saving Severus the reflex of repeating that last word. "Mr. Potter, *are you saying you've mastered the replication spell* ?"

"Well, yes," said Lestrade, sounding as if McGonagall was overreacting. "It's pretty easy when you do it Grandpa's way. Even Neville managed to get it right after three weeks. But that's not important! Sir, we found the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets! Harry knows how to get in!"

Severus was so unsettled at rapid turn of events he forgot turn on his suspicions before it was too late.

"This is excellent news," said Dumbledore. "Please show me the way. Severus, Minerva, alert me if anyone besides Harry, Julia and Neville are missing."

And with that he took off, running alongside Lestrade and Potter.

Severus and Minerva stared at their rapidly distancing backs stupidly.

At length, Minerva let out a long breath.

"Let's do what he says."

They headed downstairs. On their way, they were accosted by Lockhart on the second floor. He beamed at them.

"So sorry - dozed off - what's going on?"

He didn't seem to notice that McGonagall looking at him with something remarkably like hatred. Severus stepped forward.

"Just the man," he said. "The very man we've been looking for. A girl has been snatched by the monster, Lockhart. Taken into the Chamber of Secrets itself. Seems like you've caught the wrong monster."

Lockhart blanched.

"That's right, Gilderoy," said McGonagall, her eyes glinting. "Hard to image how you made such a mistake. But it shouldn't be too hard to do it a second time. You know where the Chamber of Secrets is and you know how to take down the monster. You're even writing a book about it."

"Am I? I don't recall -"

"What is this? Why the fear?" Severus mocked. "Or could it be Mr. Holmes was right about you after all? Isn't that a thought, Gilderoy Lockhart, nothing but a *fraud*…"

"No, I really - you misunderstand-"

"Then prove it," said McGonagall. "Tonight will be an excellent time for you to rectify your mistake. We'll make sure everyone's out of your way. Free-reign, just the way you always wanted. You'll be able to tackle the monster all by yourself."

Lockhart gazed desperately around him, but there was no one to

come for his rescue. His pale lips were trembling, and in the absence of his toothy grin, he looked weak-chinned and feeble. Severus curled his lip at the pathetic sight.

"V-very well," Lockhart said. "I'll - I'll be in my office, getting - getting ready."

And he left.

"Right," said Professor McGonagall, whose nostrils were flared, "that's got him out from under our feet. We'll alert Albus just in case. In the meantime, we search through the school as he instructed."

The teachers reconvened in the staffroom an hour later. The sun had already set at that point.

"Just Miss Lestrade missing in my House," said Sprout anxiously.

"Mr. Potter and Mr. Longbottom in mine," said McGonagall, trembling slightly, "Miss Granger, of course, presumably still in the Chamber…"

Flitwick burst into tears.

"How could this have happened?" asked Sinistra, who had sunk, weak-kneed, into a chair, "When could this have happened?"

"You know the Gryffindor second year class schedules, Professor McGonagall," said Severus quietly.

"It's Friday, so they would've had Herbology and Charms," said McGonagall. "Pomona, Filius, you must've seen Miss Granger in your classes, or you would've alerted us…"

Flitwick and Sprout nodded; the former whilst wiping his overflowing tears with a handkerchief.

"My first years would've had Transfigurations and History of Magic," said Sprout. "Minerva, did you…?"

"I saw her in class, yes. I distinctly remember complimenting her rapid progress."

"I escorted Mr. Potter, Mr. Longbottom, and Miss Granger to the music room after their class," squeaked Flitwick. "They said Mr. Potter was having trouble sleeping, and needed to recharge his music player to help him sleep. I escorted all three of them back to the Great Hall after he was done."

Something about this tickled Severus' mind. "And Miss Lestrade?"

"I took her the hospital wing," said McGonagall in a strange croaky voice. "She wanted to see Ms. Shin, and tell her Uncle Jason was taking care of the Mandrakes… and, and she'd be better in no time…"

Sometimes he really wished McGonagall wasn't such a secret softie.

"You informed Binns' of her absence."

"Yes," said McGonagall thickly after blowing her nose. "Poppy can confirm if she was there."

Madam Pomfrey quickly confirmed Miss Lestrade stayed by Ms. Shin's bed for a full hour, talking to her Petrified Aunt. The tickle in Severus' mind turned into a persistent knocking.

"Did she draw the screens around?" Severus asked.

"Now that you mention it, yes, she did," said Pomfrey.

Suddenly, Severus had an idea of what had happened.

"I have a theory I want to confirm. Please excuse me."

He swept to the Defence Corridor, leaving bewildered colleagues in the wake. He knocked on Lockhart's office. No one responded. He hexed the door to open. The wooden door was blasted off from its hinges.

The office had been striped. The retina-burning photographs of Lockhart had been pulled down from the walls. The desk was bare except for one lonely inkwell. The bedroom door was partially open, but he didn't enter. No doubt it was cleared out of more horrors.

Severus drew in a deep breath. He pictured the afternoon as it would've happened: Longbottom, Potter and Granger convened in the music room. Lestrade escaped McGonagall's clutches by first detouring to the Hospital Wing, left a clone there, and snuck off to the music room to join them. He remembered Jason and Jeremy being a terror to catch in the act, what with their arsenal of unorthodox spells. It was entirely possible Lestrade had picked up an invisibility charm from them and used it reach the music room undetected. Anyway, the four students convened in the music room - for what? Only one reason: to speak to Sherlock Holmes. Potter and Lestrade told Dumbledore they'd found the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. No doubt they'd verified their findings with Holmes, which meant they were likely correct. Lockhart was a fool, somehow convinced no one could figure his secret, as if his everyday behaviour didn't broadcast it. Supposing Lockhart feared, rightly, if anyone could and would expose his secret it was Potter and his gang, then he would've kept close tabs on Potter. *If* Lockhart overhead them speaking to Holmes - and Severus distinctly remembered there was a fireplace in the Music Room, and 221B was connected to the Floo-network - then Lockhart would've known the game was over, hence the flight. End of story. And only one way to verify.

Severus threw Floo-powder into the nearest open fire, shouting:

"221B!"

Final Notes : Nasty Snape is nasty. It's going to take a lot more than just budding camaraderie with John and Sherlock to make Snape even *consider* treating Harry with a degree of decency. I know his behavior bothers a lot of readers, but I don't see Snape as the kind of person who tries to be kind in behalf of the people he likes. If anything, he would divorce the two concepts without a second thought and sneer at the suggestion that he should.

Had a bit of a block while writing this thing; intermittent chapters are always so complicated. Resolution to CS in the next chapter! (I hope…)

Secrets, Silence and Slytherin

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Eight: Secrets, Silence and Slytherin

John regarded Lockhart, who'd been aiming his wand at John with a manic glint in his eye since he appeared from the fireplace.

"Don't do anything stupid," said John in a calm voice, whilst taking a step forward.

"My dear man," said Lockhart. "Do use your common sense. I'm a wizard and you're a Muggle. There's really no contest here. Don't worry-just one little spell and you'll forget everything. It won't even hurt."

"Rather not get mind-raped, thanks," John said. "I like all my memories."

It wasn't easy, fighting wizards, John thought. Without a gun, John had only two advantages: magic people tended to not take non-magic people seriously and they invariably stretched their arm towards their target before casting a spell. The latter gave John a convenient handle to grab onto before committing some serious acts of brutality. John hadn't lost a fight yet, but the consequences of losing were too costly to contemplate, so John tried to avoid them as much as possible.

"Putting a memory charm on me isn't going to solve your problems, Lockhart," said John steadily, both palms up and taking another step forward. "Attacking a hapless Muggle like me isn't going to improve things, trust me."

"You don't understand at all," said Lockhart, shaking his head impatiently, "Muggles are memory charmed to forget things *every day* . I'm perfectly within my rights to obliviate you for knowing too much. I mean, come on; none of this would've happened if you minded your own business like a good Muggle and stayed away from our world."

"A bit difficult when your son is a wizard. And did you honestly think you'd get away with making stuff up and publishing it as if it were real?"

"Dr. Watson," said Lockhart, frowning at John. "Do use your common sense. My books wouldn't have sold half as well if people didn't think those things can be done and have been done - by me."

"What did you do then?"

"I found people who *have* done something against the Dark Arts and dark creatures. I asked them exactly how they managed to do what they did. Then I put a Memory Charm on them so they wouldn't remember doing it. If there's one thing I pride myself on, it's my Memory Charms."

"So you took credit just like that."

"It's better this way," said Lockhart petulantly, "No one wants to read about some ugly old Armenian warlock, even if he *did* save a village from werewolves. He'd look dreadful on the front cover. No dress sense at all. And the witch who banished the Brandon Banshee had a harelip."

"How nice of you to give readers something nicer to look at," John said sarcastically.

"Isn't it?" said Lockhart, a shadow of his old smile on his face. "It was a lot of work, doing the stories justice. It's not all book signings

and publicity photos, you know. And if you want fame, you have to be prepared for a long hard slog."

John took one more step. Lockhart's smile took the full-on gleam.

"Your meddling ends here, Dr. Watson!" he said. "Say good-bye to your memories!"

He raised his wand high over his head and started to yell, "Oblivi-"

The fire in the fireplace turned green and a voice shouted, " *Watson!* "

Lockhart hesitated for a fraction, and John seized the chance. Lunging low, John grabbed hold of Lockhart's wand-arm and twisted it hard behind his back with the wand pointing towards his torso.

"-ate!"

There was small explosion of light like a stun grenade going off in close proximity. John rotated on one heel to face Lockhart, arms guarding the face, and readied to follow up.

When the light faded, John surveyed the battle ground.

Snape was at the hearth, frozen in wand-out position. Lockhart was standing in the middle of the room, eyes unfocused and humming placidly to himself. His wand lay abandoned on the floor.

Slowly, John lowered both fists.

"John?" said Mrs. Hudson's frightened voice.

Snape's wand snapped to her direction. John jumped into his line of sight and resumed fighting pose.

"Get out of the way, Watson," Snape hissed, wand outstretched.

"No," said John, adjusting stance to make sure Mrs. Hudson was completely covered.

"She's just your landlady."

"She's my *friend* ."

Snape pursed his lips. "Listen to me-"

"No, *you* listen to me!" John shouted. "If you do anything to Mrs. Hudson, I won't hold back!"

Snape's face turned like a death mask in a moment.

"I might risk it, seeing as I have slight advantage," he said, shaking and bloodless.

"Like to see you try," John snarled. "I was a solider. I've *killed* people."

Snape and John kept their stalemate for a long time. John didn't dare look back, and prayed Mrs. Hudson had the sense to go downstairs and lock the door-for all the good it was going to do against a wizard who could teleport himself anywhere. *It's really unfair*, John grumbled privately.

A hand touched John's bicep.

"Matters have finally come to a head, Snape?" said Sherlock, gently pushing John aside.

"Rather," Snape confirmed, finally lowering the wand. "Hermione Granger was taken to the Chamber. Dumbledore, Mr. Watson and Miss Lestrade headed there about an hour ago."

Sherlock's eyes flashed as he walked over to Lockhart, who had the familiar placid look of unconcern John had witnessed many times over the course of beating up impertinent Ministry of Magic officials.

"Where is the diary?" Sherlock demanded.

"Hmm?" said Lockhart, looking at Sherlock in a good-natured way.

"He was hit by his own memory charm," Snape said.

Sherlock turned thunderous. "What is your name?"

Lockhart scratched the back of his ear as he thought the question over.

"I don't know," he answered.

"Do you have any childhood memories?" Sherlock asked. "What about the day you were born? Do you even know who you are?"

Lockhart continued to look politely confused. John let out a long breath, thinking: *That could've been me.*

"… His memory is blown to oblivion," Sherlock concluded. "It's no use asking him questions. Search him. He might have it in his person."

"The diary is the agent, I take it," said Snape.

"Obviously."

Sherlock and Snape roughly pushed Lockhart into a chair and rummaged his pockets. John took a shaken Mrs. Hudson downstairs to her tiny flat.

"What's going on, John?" she asked fearfully. "Who are these people? What happened to that man?"

"It's alright, Mrs. Hudson," said John, holding her wrinkled hand. "The… blond guy is in huge trouble. I think he had a psychotic break."

Mrs. Hudson trembled. "Oh, dear…"

"We'll sort it out," John promised. "Just stay here and keep the door locked. I'll let you know when everything is clear."

John didn't climb up the stairs until the lock on the door to Mrs. Hudson's flat clicked. Snape and Sherlock were standing a foot away from Lockhart when John returned to the sitting room. Neither was holding a journal.

"He doesn't have it?" John asked.

"No," Sherlock replied.

"It seems to me that you know what had happened," said Snape. "I'd like to know."

"We know parts of it. Harry should have the full story."

Snape pulled a face.

"That's what you get for taking away his phone," Sherlock snapped.

"There is this archaic but effective method called letter writing," Snape drawled.

"Which we have used to limited effect," Sherlock retorted. "Here is the summary: There is a diary in Hogwarts that's also a soul wand; the soul wand possessed its owners to carry out the attacks; Lockhart was the last owner as far as I know - the only way he could've learned Hagrid's expulsion seventy years ago for supposedly raising the Monster of Slytherin in a cupboard in the dungeons is through the enchanted diary."

Snape thought this through.

"Please don't tell me Grandmaster Shin is in communication with you."

"I won't, then," said Sherlock.

Snape let out a gusting sigh. "I cannot believe I'm feeling sympathy towards Lockhart."

"We're nosy parents," said John.

"To put it mildly," snorted Snape. "I must return to Hogwarts and report this to Dumbledore. Good day."

Snape vanished, taking Lockhart with him.

Sherlock tackled John to the sofa as soon as they were left alone. As Sherlock loomed over, John noticed his eyes had dimmed and his firm lips were shaking.

"What is your name?"

"John Hailey Watson."

"How did we first meet?"

"Mike Stamford introduced us at Barts," John looked into the pale eyes. "I'm okay, he didn't get me."

Sherlock let out an immense sigh of relief.

"No. You're right. He didn't."

It was worth it, John thought, as they round their arms around each other. It was worth many more scares to catch a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. It was the moments of revelation like these that made the months and years of exasperation worth it.

About an hour prior to the events in 221B, Harry waiting fretfully inside Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. He felt a glorious sense of relief when he saw Albus Dumbledore step inside. Neville and Julia, who were there with him, both let out sighs of relief too.

"Somehow, I am not surprised to find myself here," said Dumbledore, eyes twinkling. "Everything *does* seem to go back here, doesn't it? Now there's something you need to show me?"

"Right here, sir," said Harry.

He indicated the toilet at the end. Moaning Myrtle was sitting on the tank.

"Oh, it's you," she said when she saw Harry. "What do you want this time?"

"I want you to tell Dumbledore how you died," said Harry.

Myrtle's whole aspect changed at once. She looked as though she had never been asked such a flattering question.

"Ooooh, it was dreadful, sir," she said with relish. "It happened right in here. I died in this very stall. I remember it so well. I'd hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked, and I was crying, and then I heard somebody come in. They said something funny. A different language, I think it must have been. Anyway, what really got me was that it was a *boy* speaking. So I unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own toilet, and then-" Myrtle swelled importantly, her face shining. "I *died* ."

"How?"

"No idea," said Myrtle in hushed tones. "I just remember seeing a pair of great, big, yellow eyes. My whole body sort of seized up, and then I was floating away…" She looked dreamily at Harry. "And then I came back again. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, you see. Oh, she was sorry she'd ever laughed at my glasses."

"Where exactly did you see the eyes?" asked Julia.

"Somewhere there," said Myrtle, pointing vaguely toward the sink in front of her toilet.

Harry, Julia and Neville hurried over to it. It looked like an ordinary sink, except scratched on the side of one of the copper taps was a tiny snake.

"That tap's never worked," said Myrtle brightly as Harry touched it.

Harry drew in a huge breath. All those months of actively hiding the fact he was a Parselmouth, now was the time of disclosure. Harry looked over at Dumbledore, and he gave Harry an encouraging nod.

"I'm going to do something disturbing," Harry warned.

Julia looked at him curiously and Neville went blank in bewilderment. Harry stared hard at the tiny engraving, trying to imagine it was real. If he moved his head, the candlelight made it look as though it were moving.

"Open," he said.

A strange hissing escaped him instead of words, and at once the tap

glowed with a brilliant white light and began to spin. Next second, the sink began to move; the sink, in fact, sank, right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, a pipe wide enough for a man to slide into.

After staring at the opening for some time, Harry steeled himself, turned around and faced his friends, who may not be any longer.

He was surprised when he found only Neville was pale and gaping in shock. Julia had a wide-eyed look that contained a lot of things, but not fear towards Harry.

"You knew?" Harry asked.

"I wondered," said Julia, looking at Harry awkwardly. "You never looked at a snake directly when we practiced the *Serpensortia* curse, and you wouldn't speak either."

Harry felt his dread ebb away, slowly. "I wasn't supposed to let people know."

"Per my advice," said Dumbledore. "I want you to know, Neville and Julia, that I trust Harry. Not for one moment did I think Harry was behind these attacks, even though I knew he was a Parselmouth. Do you believe me?"

Neville closed his mouth, took in several breaths before hardening his expression.

"Yes, sir," he said stoutly.

"Absolutely," Julia agreed.

Dumbledore beamed as Harry let out a weak laugh.

"Now," said Dumbledore solemnly. "Before we proceed, I must tell you some very bad news: Hermione Granger has been taken by the Heir of Slytherin, right into the Chamber itself."

Julia and Neville gasped. Harry's insides did a somersault.

" *Hermione* ?" Harry stammered. "She was taken to the Chamber?

When ?"

"Within the last hour, by my estimate," said Dumbledore to three very pale students. "I myself am determined to go ahead and search for Hermione. Harry, too, from the look on his face. As for you, Neville and Julia, I will not accuse you of anything if you do not wish to proceed any further."

"I'm going," said Julia immediately. "Hermione helped me so much; I want to help her too."

"Me too," said Neville.

To Harry's amazement, Dumbledore's bright blue eyes went rather watery. When he walked towards the opening, however, he was perfectly composed.

"I shall go first," he said.

Dumbledore crouched in front of the opening, slid both of his long legs into the pipe, and pushed himself forward, sliding out of sight. Harry followed quickly. He lowered himself slowly into the pipe, then let go.

It was like rushing down an endless, slimy, dark slide. He could see more pipes branching off in all directions, but none as large as theirs, which twisted and turned, sloping steeply downward, and he knew that he was falling deeper below the school than even the dungeons. Behind him he could hear Neville and Julia, Neville bouncing slightly off the crevices.

And then, just as he had begun to worry about what would happen when he hit the ground, the pipe levelled out, and he shot out of the end with a wet thud, landing on the damp floor of a dark stone tunnel large enough to stand in. Dumbledore was getting to his feet a little ways away, covered in slime and perfectly fine about it. Harry stood aside as Neville came whizzing out of the pipe, too. Julia crashed right into him shortly thereafter.

"We must be miles under the school," said Harry, his voice echoing in the black tunnel.

"Under the lake, probably," said Julia, squinting around at the dark, slimy walls.

All four of them turned to stare into the darkness ahead. Dumbledore swished his wand; balls of light trailed out of the end and created a lit path inside the tunnel they were in. Their shadows on the wet walls looked monstrous.

"Now remember," Dumbledore said quietly as they walked cautiously forward, "at any sign of movement, close your eyes right away."

The tunnel was quiet as the grave. The first unexpected sound they heard was a loud crunch as Neville stepped on what turned out to be a rat's skull. Harry lowered his glance look at the floor and saw that it was littered with small animal bones. Trying very hard not to imagine what Hermione might look like if/when they found her, Harry followed closely as Dumbledore led them forward, around a dark bend in the tunnel.

"Harry, there's something up there-" said Julia hoarsely, grabbing Harry's arm.

They froze, watching. Harry could just see the outline of something huge and curved, lying right across the tunnel. It wasn't moving. Harry swallowed hard. His heart was beating so fast it hurt.

Dumbledore directed his wand at it and said, " *Lumos.* "

The light slid over a gigantic snake skin, of a vivid, poisonous green, lying curled and empty across the tunnel floor. The creature that had shed it must have been twenty feet long at least.

"The Basilisk's skin," said Dumbledore, stooping down to examine it. "Shed not long ago."

Harry stepped forward to take a closer look. That moment, Neville's knees gave away. As his legs folded, Neville's wand slipped out of his pocket and the large rock next to him vanished with a loud BANG.

The tunnel started to shake. Harry flung his arms over his head and

ran, slipping over the coils of snake skin, out of the way of great chunks of tunnel ceiling that were thundering to the floor. Next moment, he was standing alone, gazing at a solid wall of broken rock.

"Professor Dumbledore! Julia! Neville!" he shouted. "Are you okay?!"

"I'm here!" said Julia's muffled voice from behind the rock fall. "I'm okay - Neville's knocked out, though… I think a rock hit his head…"

There was a dull thud and a loud, high-pitched " *Ow* !" It sounded as though Julia just got hit by a rock too.

"I can't find Dumbledore," Julia's voice said, sounding desperate. "What now? I can't get through…"

Harry looked up at the tunnel ceiling. Huge cracks had appeared in it. He never tried to break apart large rocks like these by magic, and now didn't seem a good moment to try - what if the whole tunnel caved in? Dumbledore may have been buried under the rubble - the new wall was approximately in the area where he last stood. Neither Harry nor Julia had the ability to dig him out. Perhaps it was just his own guilt speaking, but he didn't think a cave-in would finish off Dumbledore. Hermione had already been in the Chamber of Secrets for close to an hour; could he really afford to stay behind and do little better than nothing?

"Listen," he called to Julia. "It'll take more than just a rock-shower to finish off Dumbledore. Wait for him with Neville. I'll go on. If I'm not back in an hour…"

There was a very pregnant pause.

"I'll try and shift some of this rock," said Julia, who seemed to be trying to keep her voice steady. "So you can-can get back through. And Harry-"

"See you in a bit," said Harry, trying to inject some confidence into his shaking voice.

And he set off alone past the giant snake skin.

The tunnel turned and turned again. Every nerve in Harry's body was tingling unpleasantly. He wanted the tunnel to end, yet dreaded what he'd find when it did. Then, at last, as he crept around yet another bend, he saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds.

Harry approached. His throat was very dry. There was no need to pretend these stone snakes were real; their eyes looked strangely alive. He cleared his throat, and the emerald eyes seemed to flicker.

"Open," said Harry, in a low, faint hiss.

The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight, and Harry, shaking from head to foot, walked inside.

Neville woke up, blinking and seeing stars. Julia's concerned face swam into view.

"Hey," she said quietly. "How do you feel?"

"Like I head-butted a rock," Neville groaned as he felt his head pounding. "Where is Harry? Dumbledore?"

"No idea where Dumbledore is," said Julia. She swallowed. "Harry went ahead by himself without backup. *Idiot* ."

Neville sighed. "He does that."

He sat up. There was a rock wall where the tunnel used to stretch out further. His wand was rolling around making hissing noises. Even an idiot like him could figure out what had happened.

"Figures I'd trigger a cave-in at the worst possible moment," said Neville dully.

The two of them sat in a miserable silence. Neville felt like a useless failure. Last year, when Harry confronted Quirrell and You-Know-Who, Neville had been there to provide moral support. Now he couldn't even do that, and Harry was off to face the Monster of

Slytherin alone.

Neville wrapped his arms around himself as he further descended into misery. He'd been a millstone around Harry's ankles for the last three weeks, completely unable to help and only getting in the way. It all started when he'd kept a wary eye on Harry since Ron was found petrified over the Christmas holidays, for if anything would make him sit dangerously close to the edge of a dormitory window that was it. Sure enough, he'd heard Harry quietly get up from his four-poster one night. Instead of heading towards the window, however, Neville saw him tip-toe to the door.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

Harry didn't look entirely surprised to find him awake. "Go back to sleep, Neville."

"Where are you going?" Neville asked again. "It's curfew; you're not allowed to go outside the tower."

"I'm just going to talk to Hermione in the common room," said Harry, "Nothing wrong with that."

"Why do you have to talk to her *now* ?" Neville asked as he sat up straighter. "Harry, is this about the Chamber of Secrets?"

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose, and sighed deeply.

"Well, yeah," he said at length, "So you see, it's really important."

"Can I hear about it too?" Neville persisted.

Harry had looked annoyed, but his brow cleared, and he said, smiling: "Sure, why not."

They went down to the common room. Hermione was waiting at one of the tables near the fireplace. She didn't look completely surprised that he was accompanying Harry either.

"Here is the gist," said Hermione. Then she launched into a short summary of what they knew: the monster of Slytherin was a basilisk, which was also known (appropriately) as the King of Serpents. The

Heir of Slytherin was a soul locked inside a diary, and it was possessing its owner and using the basilisk to attack people. No one saw the Basilisk directly, that's why no one was actually killed; Mrs. Norris saw the reflection; Miss Jackie through Nick; Nick got the full blast of it, but he couldn't die *again* ; Ron and Ginny probably saw the reflection from a mirror. The vital clue lay in the last attack: Ron and Ginny had gone to Moaning Myrtle to ask her questions, and clearly the information they got were vital ones because the Heir of Slytherin attacked them right then and there, despite being pure-blood.

"So we need to talk to Myrtle," Hermione finished. "The problem is we can't just go to her toilet willy-nilly."

Definitely not, Neville thought fearfully. The teachers and ghosts were watching the students like hawks, and day and night Filch was guarding the wall that had the first message, which was next to the girls' toilet on the second floor Hermione was talking about.

"Harry has an invisibility cloak, but that's not enough; Filch can still hear us," said Hermione. "I'm pretty sure there are noise-blocking spells we could learn and use, but the problem is, it would block out Myrtle's crying too, and Filch might become suspicious if she suddenly goes silent. Besides, we can't keep leaving the Gryffindor tower at night trying to find a good time to talk to her."

"That leaves the day time," said Harry. "We need to talk to her while the hallways are *loud* ; that way Filch'll never suspect we're there."

Neville had a catching of breath, and his skin went cold at the blithe words. As a flash of lightning in the night showed in an instant every detail of a wide landscape, so at one glance he seemed to see every possible result of such an action - the detection, the capture, and possible irreparable failure.

" *Think what you're doing* !" he cried. "How are you going to leave the group without the teachers knowing? And what are you going to do once you find the Chamber?"

"We've got it all worked out," said Hermione smoothly at Neville's horrified face. "There is a duplication spell that lets you create

clones of yourself. Julia Lestrade from Hufflepuff knows how to do it and she's going to teach us how. Once we master the spell, we can make a clone, send it off to the next class, put on the invisibility cloak, and go talk to Myrtle. If we do find out where the Chamber is, we'll go straight to Dumbledore."

Neville looked incredulously at Harry and Hermione.

"Hermione, I don't think- this could go seriously wrong-"

Harry just shrugged.

"I can't see any other way. Think about it: we need to find the Chamber of Secrets and find the Heir of Slytherin. If we don't, they're going to close the school and that would be the end of Hogwarts. Do you want that to happen?"

Neville turned it over his head.

"No," he said at last. "I don't want Hogwarts to close."

"Exactly. That's why we're doing everything we can."

"You might get caught!"

"That's part of the risk. We need more information and Moaning Myrtle has it."

Neville took in a shaking breath.

"Well, I still don't like it, but I suppose there's no choice. When do we start?"

"You're not coming."

"Then you're not going," said Neville stubbornly. "If you don't let me join, I'm going straight to Professor McGonagall and tell her everything."

"You can't help."

"How do you know that? You can't tell what may happen. I can be a

lookout if you think I can't handle the spell. Anyway, I made up my mind, I want to help."

Harry and Hermione relented in the end. Julia Lestrade came over to the Gryffindor table the next morning. She appeared not to think it odd Neville was listening, too.

"From where Grandpa comes from, the duplication spell is the simplest form of transfiguration, like turning a match into a needle," Julia explained. "That's because magic people over there don't use *wands* . Since there isn't a wand to let your magic out, your magic has nowhere to go except inside your body. If you let the magic stew inside your body long enough while you're focusing on who you are and what you look like, eventually your magic creates an avatar of you to stop you from stewing it too much. That's it."

"Sounds hard to me," said Harry as Neville sputtered in utter confusion.

"It's not that bad," said Julia. "Uncle Jeremy taught me how when I was six. I managed to get it right in a month. Grandpa got really angry at him, though, when he found out," she added. "He was so angry he decked Uncle Jeremy over the head with a two-by-four."

The three of them stared at Julia incredulously.

" *Why* ?"

"I don't know," said Julia helplessly. "He wasn't shouting in English."

They practiced every night. To hide what they were really doing, they picked a project from Miss Jackie's notes-the Magical Mobile Phone, since it sounded the easiest-and made a huge show of asking questions about it to the teachers during the day. Harry was the fastest to pick up the duplication spell, creating an insubstantial clone that looked just like him in a week, and a flesh-and-blood one on the next week. Hermione was still struggling to produce a flesh-and-blood clone and Neville could create an illusion of his own self only one out of three times by the third week. In the end they decided Harry and Julia would go and question Myrtle while either Hermione or Neville distracted the teacher so Harry could slip away.

Thus his intention to help had been thoroughly unnecessary.

Then the actual execution of the plan came. They had first decided to distract Lockhart, since the class after Defence Against the Dark Arts was History of Magic and that didn't require any magic use. But a short fight between Harry and Hermione forced them to change targets.

"He's not a brainless git!" said Hermione shrilly, after Harry off-handedly remarked it should be easy since Lockhart was a brainless git.

Harry regarded her in frustration. "How can you still defend him after everything we know about him, Hermione? He removed all the bones in my right arm, hasn't done a single successful spell to date except maybe *Lumos*, and finally he brought back a dead Acromantula thinking it's Slytherin's monster!"

"Everyone can make a mistake," Hermione argued. "He doesn't have the kind of information we have. He only had the records to go by. No wonder he thought it was an Acromantula if the last time the school thought they banished the monster it was a Spider they found. Anyway, I told him what we know, so he knows better next time-"

"You *told* him?" Harry shouted, his eyes flashing dangerously, "Why on earth did you tell *him?* !"

"I just wanted to help!" squeaked Hermione, shrinking at Harry's temper. "And I didn't tell him much; just that we know the monster is a Basilisk and something similar happened decades ago!"

Harry entire frame started to shake like a volcano ready to erupt. Both Neville and Hermione cowered at the sight.

"Um, can we actually do it on Friday?" piped Julia, raising a hand. "I have Charms on Thursday, and I can't miss it. I'm behind as it is."

Harry's rage slowly reduced to a mere smoulder.

"Are you still having wand troubles?" he growled.

"Wand is fine, I just have to learn everything from the beginning," said Julia wearily. "I have a whole term's worth of practical to cover. Everyone else is doing elementary locomotion charms and I'm still stuck in levitation. Besides, Friday I have History. I can skip that."

"… *Fine*," Harry snapped. "Friday we have Charms and Herbology. We'll think of something by then."

Neville was sweating the entire week trying to think of an excuse that would let them hide inside a classroom long enough for Harry to clone himself and sneak out wearing his invisibility cloak. When he asked, Hermione only said, "leave it to me," with a confident smile on her face.

At the end of Charms, Hermione hurried over the Professor Flitwick, pulling Harry by the arm.

"Professor Flitwick? Is it possible for us to stop by the music room?"

"The music room? Whyever for?" asked Professor Flitwick.

"Harry's been having trouble sleeping, professor," said Hermione, stepping on Neville's foot. "Music is the only thing that helps. He has a music player, but it needs recharging."

Harry started to blink and rub his eyes tiredly. It helped that they were red due to actual lack of sleep, though not for the reasons Hermione implied. Professor Flitwick caved immediately.

"Oh, why not," he squeaked. "The player was cleared with Professor Burbage, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

Flitwick escorted the three of them to the music room after depositing their Gryffindor classmates inside the Great Hall. Harry crouched down at the foot of the electric generator and plugged his Muggle music player to charge. Neville and Hermione stood in front of him so their robes would hide him from view. Harry took out his invisibility cloak, created a clone, draped the cloak over himself and noiselessly vanished from sight. Harry's clone left with them fifteen minutes later, the invisible real-Harry walking right behind them so

he could go to the Hospital Wing where he'd promised to meet Julia.

Neville and Hermione had just returned to the Great Hall again for lunch, when Hermione suddenly clapped a hand to her forehead.

"Neville - I think I've just understood something! I've got to go to the library! I'll meet you at the toilet!"

Then she sprinted away to Lockhart, presumably to ask him to escort her to the Library.

She didn't return. Neville didn't even think it was odd until Dumbledore made his announcement. What kind of thickie was he?

"I don't know why I bother," muttered Neville, staring at the ground beneath them. "I always forget things and Gran's always going on about how I'm not as good as Dad… and she's *right* . I am practically a squib."

Julia let out a hollow laugh.

"You? Look at *me* ! My grandfather's the *Grandmaster* and I'm rubbish at magic! The only thing I can do is taught by the teacher almost everyone hates!" she let out a sob. "I should've just gone to a Muggle comprehensive. If all I can really do is Potions, I can do that after school."

"But you're good at a lot of other stuff too!" Neville protested.

"Only things even a Muggle can do." Julia savagely wiped away the tears that kept falling. "Even with my own wand, it takes me twice as much time as everyone else takes to make spells to work. I'm useless at this."

Shaking, Julia took out a small glass falcon from her pocket. It sat on her palm and peered up at her.

"Why did you send me here, grandpa?" she whispered. "Why didn't you just *tell me* I'm no good?"

The falcon spread its wings and took flight. Julia watched it fly away. The tear-tracks on her face glistened under the dim lights

Dumbledore left behind.

They sat in another bout of miserable silence.

Then they looked up, started.

A tinkling sound was coming from somewhere. They stood up and stared at where the noise was coming from. As they did so, the tinkling sound grew louder, like hundreds of glass wind-chimes were swaying against a gentle breeze.

Then they saw it-a regiment of glass falcons just like the one Julia kept inside her pocket were flying towards them from the pipe's opening.

"Grandpa's sentries!" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet. "They're here!"

The hundreds of small glass falcons floated in formation when they reached Neville and Julia.

"Everyone, Professor Dumbledore underneath these rocks," said Julia urgently. "We need to get him out. Be very careful, and make sure if you find a wand, put it in his hand."

About thirty or so sentries entered the cracks of the rock wall; the rest waited in the mid-air.

"I need a way to get pass this wall," said Julia, pointing at it. "Let's a make an opening."

The remaining sentries divided into two groups and transformed into a two giant glass hands. They started shifting away the rocks at a rapid pace. Julia and Neville helped, heedless of the cuts on their hands they received.

Soon, there was a small opening big enough for them to crawl through. Julia immediately ducked and shimmied. Neville followed her.

He ran after Julia, who sprinted down the tunnel. The glass hands, which had transformed back into miniature falcons, flanked her

either side. After many twists and turns-thankfully, there were no forks-they reached a stone wall that had two carved snakes with emerald eyes. It was divided in half to reveal an opening. Julia ran through it without a second's pause. Neville, out of breath, puffed after her.

They'd entered a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place. His heart beating very fast, Neville stood to catch his breath and listened. A soft, but horrible hissing noise was coming at the end of the chamber, as well as a piping, eerie music that sounded unearthly. The music seemed to fill his head and make his heart swell twice its size. Feeling braver, Neville walked down the chamber. The hollow eye sockets of the stone snakes seemed to be following him. More than once, with a jolt of the stomach, he thought he saw one stir.

Then, as he drew level with the last pair of pillars, he entered a nightmare.

An enormous serpent, bright, poisonous green, thick as an oak trunk, had raised itself high in the air and its great blunt head was weaving drunkenly between the pillars. A crimson bird the size of a swan was soaring around its head, and the snake was snapping furiously at it's with fangs long and thin as sabres. As Neville watched, frozen in fear, the bird dived. Its long golden beak sank out of sight and a sudden shower of dark blood spattered the floor. The snake's tail thrashed, narrowly missing Neville. It turned - Neville looked straight into its face and saw that its eyes, both its great, bulbous yellow eyes, had been punctured by the bird; blood was streaming to the floor, and the snake was hissing and spitting in agony.

Julia, who was also staring at the horrible scene like a petrified statue, said something so foul Neville felt his ears blister.

"Where did you learn that?" he muttered as they backtracked blindly, away from the writhing snake.

"My Daddy's a police officer!" Julia shouted incoherently.

The blinded serpent swayed, confused, but still deadly. The crimson bird was circling its head, piping its eerie song, jabbing here and there at the snake's scaly nose as the blood poured from its ruined eyes.

The snake's tail whipped across the floor again; something large crashed into Neville, knocking the wind out of him. He heard Harry's voice around his navel let out a series of swear words so bad if he ever used them in his Gran's earshot, he'd have soap pouring out of his mouth for weeks.

"What's your excuse?" Neville asked stupidly as something soft hit his face.

"My Mum's ex-army!" said Harry. "C'mon, get up! Let's get out of the way!"

They dived behind a pillar. There, Neville peeled off the soft thing that clung to his face. It was the raggedly Sorting Hat. His whole brain turned into a trembling, terror filled question mark at the sight of it.

"Fawkes - the phoenix bird over there - brought it with him," Harry explained. "I don't know why. Hermione is at the statue over there. I think she's stunned."

Neville craned his neck to see the statue Harry pointed out. The face was ancient and monkeyish, its mouth was wide open, and had a long, thin beard that fell almost to the bottom of the wizard's sweeping stone robes, where two enormous grey feet stood on the smooth Chamber floor. Between the feet, facedown, laid a black-robed figure with lots of bushy brown hair.

"So who called the snake?" asked Julia.

"Tom Riddle," said Harry grimly. " *He* is the Heir of Slytherin. *He* framed Hagrid seventy years ago and then kept his sixteen-year-old self inside a diary. *He* possessed Lockhart and attacked Ron and Ginny - after Ginny chucked his diary into Myrtle's toilet."

The basilisk reared up again. Without thinking, Neville rammed the

Sorting Hat onto his head and threw himself flat onto the floor as the snake's tail swung at them again.

Help me - help me - Neville thought, his eyes screwed tight under the hat. *Please help me…*

There was no answering voice. Instead, the hat contracted, as though an invisible hand was squeezing it very tightly.

Something very hard and heavy thudded onto the top of Neville's head, almost knocking him out. Stars winking in front of his eyes, he grabbed the top of the hat to pull it off and felt something long and hard beneath it.

A gleaming silver sword had appeared inside the hat, its handle glittering with rubies the size of eggs.

" *Harry* !" Neville breathed, grabbing the handle of the sword. It was heavy and very long - Neville could barely lift the point off the ground.

Harry and Julia stared at Neville and the sword in astonishment for a second, Then instead of asking questions, they got to their feet and grabbed hold of the handle too. The three of them hefted the sword off the ground. The basilisk's head was falling, its body coiling around, hitting pillars as it twisted to face them. Neville could see the vast, bloody eye sockets, see the mouth stretching wide, wide enough to swallow him whole, lined with fangs long as the sword, thin, glittering, venomous-

It lunged blindly- and it hit the Chamber wall right next to them. It lunged again, and its forked tongue lashed Harry's side. They stepped back, putting their whole weight behind the sword, and got ready.

The basilisk reared again. With a tremendous shout, the three of them thrust the sword towards the lunging snake. Their aim was true-the sword flew straight through the air and drove deep inside the serpent's open mouth.

Warm blood drenched Neville's face. There was a loud thud in front

of them as the basilisk keeled over sideways and fell, twitching, to the floor.

Neville collapsed to his feet, feeling completely spent. Dimly, he noted a handsome, sixteen-year-old boy, wearing Hogwarts robes walking towards the snake. He appeared strangely blurred around the edges, and he looked intently at Harry's face.

"No matter," said the boy, and though he'd never seen this boy before, Neville knew he was the Tom Riddle Harry mentioned earlier. "It makes no difference. In fact, I prefer it this way. Just you and me, Harry Potter… you and me…"

He raised the wand in his hand.

Then, in a rush of wings, Fawkes had soared back overhead and dropped something on Harry's lap - *the diary* .

For a split second, the three of them and Riddle, wand still raised, stared at it. Then, as though he had meant to do it all along, Harry seized the book and ran it through one of the dead basilisk's fangs.

There was a long, dreadful, piercing scream. Ink spurted out of the diary in torrents, streaming over Harry's hands, flooding the floor. Riddle was writhing and twisting, screaming and flailing and then-

He was gone. The wand he held fell to the floor with a clatter and there was silence. Silence except for the steady *drip, drip* of ink still oozing from the diary. The basilisk venom had burned a sizzling hole right through it.

Shaking all over, Neville pulled himself up. His head was spinning as though he'd just travelled miles by Floo powder. Julia was picking up the wand, which he just realised belonged to Hermione, and the diary and the Sorting Hat. Together with a huge tug, the three of them retrieved the glittering sword from the roof of the basilisk's mouth. Harry went over to Hermione at the end of the Chamber, pointed his wand at her and said: " *Enervate.* "

Hermione let out a faint moan and stirred. Her bemused eyes travelled from the huge form of the dead basilisk, over Harry, Neville

and Julia in their blood-soaked robes, then to the diary in Julia's hands. Then she started to weep hysterically.

"Harry - oh, Harry I was so *stupid!* It was *Lockhart*, he had the diary… he picked it up in the Moaning Myrtle's toilet because I told him the Chamber of Secrets had been open before years ago! And-"

"It's alright, I had no idea either until Riddle told me," said Harry quickly, as Julia held up the diary, and showing her the fang hole. "Riddle's finished. Look! Him and the basilisk. C'mon, let's get out of here-"

Fawkes and the glass falcons were waiting for them, hovering in the Chamber entrance. Harry urged Hermione to her feet. They stepped over the motionless coils of the dead basilisk, through the echoing gloom, and back into the tunnel. Neville heard the stone doors close behind them with a soft hiss.

After a few minutes' progress up the dark tunnel, they saw the rock wall in a distance. The falcons with them joined the ones that stayed behind to dig out Dumbledore and formed humanoid figure. The figure shattered into nothing, and revealed a small, clean-shaven old man with short hair, a sorrowful face and dark eyes.

" *Grandpa* !" Julia yelled, speeding up.

Grandmaster Shin smiled at her briefly before turning his face towards the rock wall. He pulled out a folding fan out of his pocket, and whipped the fan in an upward motion. Immediately, all the rocks that blocked the tunnel shot upwards and returned to the ceiling from whence they came.

Dumbledore lay in the middle of the floor, looking quite battered and bruised. His half-moon glasses were cracked. Grandmaster Shin squatted next to him.

"You don't look so good," Mr. Shin remarked.

"My reflexes are not what they used to be," said Dumbledore ruefully. "I'm feeling exceptionally old at the moment, which is not an easy thing as I am really that old. Mr. Shin, would you be so

kind…?"

Mr. Shin picked up Dumbledore's wand from the floor and placed it gently into the headmaster's battered hand.

"I'm absolutely rubbish at healing," he said. "You're better off letting your pet Phoenix help you."

Fawkes, whose wide scarlet wings emitted a soft golden glow in the darkness, landed next to Dumbledore and lay his head on his bruised forehead. Pearly tears trickled out of his beady black eyes and slid down his glossy feathers. Wherever the tears touched, the wounds healed almost instantly.

"Phoenix tears have healing powers," said Hermione in a hushed voice.

At length Dumbledore stood up, filthy as the rest of them, but not wounded anymore. He flicked his wand and the slime, blood and dirt that clung to their robes vanished.

"I think some bed rest and a nice, steaming mug of Hot Chocolate is exactly what we need right now," said Dumbledore. "Let's get out of here and have some, shall we?"

Four months had passed since the Chamber of Secrets was discovered, the Heir of Slytherin vanquished, and the Petrified victims were subsequently restored. The incident moved from the most talk about thing among the students to a memory kept in the back of one's head in favor of studying and taking exams. The teachers, whose workload reduced correspondingly to the amount of studying the students had to do as the end of term approached, were enjoying their short breaks.

Albus Dumbledore was no exception. He was currently playing a leisurely game of chess under the bright summer sunshine with the most unexpected person- the reclusive and saturnine Shin June Hu. A tall glass of chilled lemonade and a small ceramic cup of hot green tea were sitting next to Dumbledore and Shin's respective

elbows as they pored over their game.

"Jacqueline has quite a thriving business in her hands," said Dumbledore as he moved one of his knights to an empty square. "Her Magical Mobile Network is explosively popular amongst the students, especially to those who wish to imitate Harry Potter. Speaking of," he chuckled, "my staff is starting to realise how much of a gentleman Harry had been about mobile phone usage. Severus has already put a blanket ban against all magical mobile phones in his dungeons, and I believe the other teachers are going to follow his example."

Mr. Shin pulled a face as he moved his bishop to avoid Dumbledore's knight. "This is bad news. Jacqueline works too much as it is."

"She's not working alone," said Dumbledore. "Ron Weasley is taking care of sales, your granddaughter is helping with the network maintenance, and Harry and Hermione Granger are overseeing the mobile phone development."

"Hermione, she's a smart one," said Shin thoughtfully. "She figured out how to use Floo-powder to connect the phones to the network, did she not?"

Dumbledore nodded. "She was stuck on how to create a fire effective enough to burn Floo-powder, but small enough to be kept inside a hand-held device. Conjuring up portable, water-proof fires are a specialty of hers, and she'd learn to turn on and off the effects of indefinite charms last year while creating a map of Hogwarts. She eventually connected the two together. It was sheer bad luck she asked Gilderoy to escort her to the library to confirm her hypothesis."

"How is he, by the way?"

"Still in St. Mungo's to get his memory restored."

"How likely is this?"

"Not very," said Dumbledore, shaking his head, his long silver

moustache quivering, "Impaled upon his own sword, poor Gilderoy!"

The two old wizards sat in a comfortable silence, occasionally sipping their beverages as they made their moves. In a distance, Hagrid was cheerfully assisting Professor Kettleburn in his Care of Magical Creatures class. Severus Snape briefly made an appearance in their private corner up a not-well-known balcony, holding a white ceramic mug that had red letters that read: 'Knackered' on one side next to the handle, and a red square that had a white crown and the words 'Keep Calm and Brew Up' on the other side. He left swiftly with a perturbed look on his face.

"Is Lucius Malfoy causing you trouble?" asked Shin.

"Not so much since he's been sacked as school governor," Dumbledore replied. "It's unbecoming to find amusement over someone else's misfortune, but I cannot help but find a bit of humour in the many unforeseen ways in which Lucius had brought misfortune upon himself: his scheme not only cost him his position as governor, but he also lost his House-elf-all due to his own hubris and Harry and his family's ingenuity."

"So what was his scheme?"

"We can only speculate at this point, now that Riddle has vanished from the book. But I suspect Sherlock was, as usual, quite correct: The Weasleys are one of our most prominent pure-blood families. Imagine the effect on Arthur Weasley and his new Muggle Protection Act, if his own daughter was discovered attacking and killing Muggle-borns… Very fortunate the diary was discovered, and Riddle's memories wiped from it. Who knows what the consequences might have been otherwise… and if the book wasn't discovered, why, Ginny Weasley might have taken all the blame. No one would ever have been able to prove she hadn't acted of her own free will."

"Very fortunate," Shin agreed. "I see how Lucius Malfoy's underestimation of Sherlock's intelligence and Harry's resourcefulness led to his downfall. But how does his house-elf enter the picture?"

"The poor elf was so downtrodden in Malfoy Manor, he rebelled against his masters by providing Harry hints. I'm not entirely sure how Harry managed to free the elf, but I believe there was a very dirty sock involved."

Mr. Shin snorted. "And Tom Riddle is-"

"The name by which Lord Voldemort was called as a student before he changed his name. Very few people know Lord Voldemort was once called Tom Riddle. I taught him myself, more than seventy years ago, at Hogwarts. He disappeared after leaving the school… travelled far and wide… sank so deeply into the Dark Arts, consorted with the very worst of our kind, underwent so many dangerous, magical transformations, that when he resurfaced as Lord Voldemort, he was barely recognisable. Hardly anyone connected Lord Voldemort with the clever, handsome boy who was once Head Boy here."

"Quite a brilliant one if he was able to seal a version of his own self inside a diary at age sixteen," Mr. Shin remarked.

"He was probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen," said Dumbledore. "That is, of course, until you came."

"You exaggerate."

"No, no, I'm quite serious. You have powers neither Voldemort nor I will ever have."

Mr. Shin shook his head. "You only say that about yourself because you are too noble to use certain powers. I am the mean-spirited one who does not hesitate to use Dark Arts when angered."

"It's a good thing we're alone here. I haven't blushed this much since Madam Pomfrey said she like my earmuffs." Dumbledore paused. "I advised Lucius not to go giving out any more of Lord Voldemort's old school things. If any more of them find their way into innocent hands, I think Arthur Weasley, for one, will make sure they are traced back to him, to say nothing of you."

Dumbledore moved his bishop. Shin studied the board pensively.

"I have only one more question for you, headmaster."

"Albus, please."

"… Dumbledore," Shin compromised, reluctantly. "The diary was a soul wand of sorts. You cannot tell me it was anything else. Harry has a fragment of a soul embedded in his scar. Considering the soul inside the diary and the man who tried to kill Harry Potter as a baby is one and the same, I'm inclined to think Voldemort had divided his soul into a many fragments, and one of those fragments had found refuge in Harry Potter when Voldemort's curse rebounded upon his own self," he looked at Dumbledore intently. "Why have you not told this to anyone?"

Dumbledore winced as Shin's rook took out his queen with a savage punch.

"I will answer your question if you will answer mine: when a Ministry Unspeakable, who lost his entire family to Lord Voldemort's followers during the war, used a curse that you have developed and caused several suspected followers of Voldemort and their family members to lose their ability to use magic in 1962, why were not all the victims treated and accounted for?"

Shin calmly watched Dumbledore's knight check his king.

"We are both foolish old men," he said simply.

"Indeed we are," Dumbledore agreed.

Final Notes : Am I only person who thought the sword of Gryffindor ought to be heavier than implied in the books? As former kumdo practitioner, this bothered me. Of course, it's a *magic sword*, so that might be it. Anyway, it wasn't just the momentum of three kids throwing a sword that killed the basilisk. The sentries made sure the sword dug deep :)

ETA : So the sword of Gyffindor, according to many reviewers and additional research, would weigh only 3-5 pounds, perfectly within range of a twelve year old to lift. Even a longsword (eg: claymore),

which I picture the sword being, weighs around 4.9-6.2 pounds (2.2-2.8 kg) at most. Oh well. My bad. Let's just call it Dramatic License, then. I think I was subconsciously picturing Arthur/Wart from the Disney's *Sword in the Stone* . He could *carry* the Sword in the Stone, but swinging it around was out of question.

Thus ends the Chamber of Secrets. *Phew.* PoA is going to be *very* interesting. Heehee.

Family Matters

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Twenty Nine: Family Matters

It was not a usual thing to find Detective Inspector Lestrade and Dr. Watson having a drink at their local. But one only had to know name of their local-the Leaky Cauldron-and listen to their conversation to realize there was something highly unusual going on between them.

"After two terms at Hogwarts and all of a sudden she's not a baby anymore," Lestrade grumbled over his pint. "She even stopped calling me Daddy."

John suppressed a grin. "Girls mature faster."

"That's not it and you know it," Lestrade growled. "Very interesting letter I got from Julia's head of house this past February- something about her receiving a special service award for slaying the mother-of-all serpents?"

John looked sideways. "Um, yeah, there's that too. For what it's worth, I got a letter just like it from Harry's head of house and almost had a coronary."

"Forget coronary, I wanted to pull her out ASAP." Lestrade scowled. "Do you know what she said to me? 'No, Dad, I'm going to stay.' She

sounded so much like her Mum I had chills."

John patted Lestrade's hunched back in a consoling way.

"She's growing up. You were expecting that, surely?"

"I knew she was going to grow up too fast since she takes after her Mum, but I thought I had a few more years until… you know…"

"She starts turning into a woman?"

Lestrade groaned and clutched his head between his hands. John laughed.

"Aw c'mon, it's not that bad. You're a great dad, and you're going to have the easiest teenager in the world because Julia is going to turn out just like Jackie."

"Jack might've been a secret rebel as a teen."

John snorted, "Sheeeyeah."

The two took a moment to take a deep pull from their pints.

"So are you showing up at our place this Tuesday or what?" asked Lestrade.

"I'll be there."

"Okay," Lestrade breathed deeply through his nose. "Ellen's going to interrogate you about your bedroom habits. Do me a favour and tell her *nothing* . I'll be in the flat to look after kids and there is only so much Sherlock-related TMI I can handle. Got it?"

"Got it," said John seriously before adding: "Just so you know, we mostly cuddle na-"

John ducked the shower of peanut shells pelted by Lestrade, who howled: " *AUGH, I hate you!* "

"So what are your summer plans?" asked a mortified Lestrade. "Ellen wanted to do a fishing trip at Hebrides."

"We're going to Rural Yorkshire to visit Sherlock's parents with Mycroft."

There was a brief moment of silence, during which Lestrade was simply lost for words.

"Don't they live in Edinburgh?" he asked stupidly.

"No, that's where Sherlock's Uncle Claimaen lives."

"… *What is wrong with their grandparents* ?"

"I don't know. Grandmère Eudora Holmes looked perfectly fine and sane to me when I met her two years ago."

Lestrade took a long, bracing swallow from his pint.

"If you two ever decide to have more kids," he declared, "stop the plague at this generation. The names just scream child abuse."

John considered the consequences of saying the first response that came to mind. They were summarily dismissed because the probable reaction was worth it.

"If it's a girl, we're naming her Beatrix; if it's a boy, we're naming him Benedict."

Lestrade almost choked himself to death.

John returned to 221B after resuscitating Lestrade using the Heimlich manoeuvre. At first glance, the sight of Harry (age 12, turning 13 in a few weeks) and Sherlock (mental age: 12) sitting next each other at the sitting room table discussing homework looked highly ordinary. Again, one only needed to actually listen to the content of their discussion to realise it was not.

"… No, no, *no* ! It's not just the actual burning a witch has to avoid, but also the interrogation and jail time!"

" *Oh* . Right. So the basic Flame-Freezing Charm to prevent the burning and the Confundus charm to get away from the interrogation…"

John took the seat across Sherlock.

"Having fun with the medieval witch burning essay?"

Harry didn't look up from where he was rapidly typing another paragraph to his *'Witch Burning in the Fourteenth Century Was Completely Pointless - discuss* ' essay for History of Magic. "It keeps getting longer!" he complained.

"Weren't you worried about not meeting the minimum requirements?"

"I'm not writing more than two feet," said Harry firmly. "I refuse on principle!"

John read what Harry had written so far:

To understand the topic, one must realize the witch-burnings of the fourteenth century were politically motivated. Most leaders of non-magic people (more commonly known as Muggles) simply disbelieved in witchcraft and sorcery as superstitious folly. Therefore it is unlikely witch-burnings of the fourteenth century were a serious effort to purge the community of real witches and wizards. It is far more likely the common Muggle person's inability to distinguish superstitious practices from actual magic, coupled with cases of Muggle-baiting, had led to an over-reaction against any and all activities that appear *to be magic, which in turn led Muggle commoners to press authorities to act against them. In the case of the Madonna Oriente, the Muggle Inquisition of Milan was not sure what to do with two women who in 1384 and in 1390 confessed to have practiced 'white magic' (the wording itself leads the writer to believe the two woman were just Muggles imitating their Witch or Wizard neighbours). The women were released with advice to avoid superstitions. Other cases of witch-trials have a similar vein, with people accused of witchcraft being feared and persecuted not based on their ability to do magic per say, but the moral panic that rose against a witch or wizard's potential to do harm. The witch-burnings in the Fourteenth Century therefore was more of a placating gesture than an actual effort to eradicate magic people.*

At any rate, the rare occasion Muggles did *catch a real witch or wizard and convicted him or her, burning had no effect whatsoever. The witch or wizard would perform a basic Flame-Freezing Charm and then pretend to shriek with pain while enjoying a gentle, tickling sensation. Indeed, Wendelin the Weird enjoyed being burned so much that she allowed herself to be caught no less than forty-seven times in various disguises. Others were caught for more noble reasons, such as releasing their Muggle neighbours falsely accused for being witches or wizards.*

One must note, though the burning of witches and wizards are a popular notion of the medieval world in general, in reality burning witches alive were exclusively practiced in France. In England, convicted witches were usually hanged before having their bodies burned and their ashes scattered. In Scotland, the convicted witches were usually strangled at the stake before having their bodies burned-though there are several instances where they were burned alive. It is far more likely a real witch or wizard escaped during the "swimming" test - a common test of innocence or guilt for associating with witchcraft, which is based on the misguided belief a guilty person floated and refused to sink when placed in water - via Apparition or Relashio charm…

"It's pretty obvious you're copying and pasting stuff from Wikipedia," John concluded.

"But Binns doesn't know Wikipedia!" Harry protested.

"I'm not letting you develop bad scholarly habits," said John firmly. "Go to the sources, Harry."

Harry scowled, but nevertheless looked through the Reference section of the Wikipedia page for witch-hunts. He sighed deeply when he saw the length of the list.

The three of them spent several quiet hours like this; John writing up a case, here and there asking Harry a word or phrase he would use for a particular scene, Sherlock scouring newspapers, online news and the like for current crimes and info, and Harry working his essay

for History of Magic.

The silence was eventually broken by the sound of a rooster crowing. Harry pulled out a clear glass case that had the same dimensions of an iPhone and had green flames burning within from his pocket. The holographic image of his best friend, Ron Weasley, sprung to view once he tapped it with his wand.

"Hi, Harry! Did you read the news?" said Ron excitedly.

"I haven't read any Wizard News beyond the fourteenth century," Harry replied.

Ron looked horrified. "Why are you working on History of Magic for? We're on *holiday* !"

"I have to get the essays done before we go to Yorkshire. Anyway, what's up?"

"Dad won the annual *Daily Prophet* draw! He won seven hundred galleons!"

Harry grinned. "Really? That's brilliant! So what is he going to do with the gold? Splurge a little?"

"We're touring Egypt for about a month. You know, where my brother Bill works at. We'll miss birthday, sorry, but I'll send your present by Owl-post. Anything you fancy?"

"Just get something funny and useless. Thanks Ron-and congrats!"

Ron's holographic image did a thumbs-up before vanishing. The green flames inside the glass casing turned blue and shrunk into the size of a tiny bell.

"Egypt, huh?" said Harry wistfully, putting glass case-a Magical Mobile phone-aside, "Sounds like fun."

"Mmmhmm," said John, reaching for their unread copy of the *Evening Prophet* . Both Harry and Sherlock crowded over to read the relevant article:

MINISTRY OF MAGIC EMPLOYEE SCOOPS GRAND PRIZE

Arthur Weasley, Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office

at the Ministry of Magic, has won the annual Daily Prophet

Grand Prize Galleon Draw.

A delighted Mr. Weasley told the Daily Prophet, "We will be

spending the gold on a summer holiday in Egypt, where our

eldest son, Bill, works as a curse breaker for Gringotts

Wizarding Bank."

The Weasley family will be spending a month in Egypt,

returning for the start of the new school year at Hogwarts,

which five of the Weasley children currently attend.

Beneath the article was a moving photograph of all nine Weasleys waving furiously, standing in front of their home in Devon: Plump little Molly Weasley; tall, balding Arthur Weasley; six sons; and one daughter, all (though the black-and-white picture didn't show it) with flaming-red hair. Right in the middle of the picture was Ron, tall and gangling, with his pet rat, Scabbers, on his shoulder and his arm around his little sister, Ginny.

"Nice," said John, then the article on the next page made the absent smile fade.

FLOO NETWORK AUTHORITY vs. JACQUELINE SHIN

HEARING TO OCCUR IN A WEEK

Ms. Jacqueline Shin, newly appointed music instructor of

Hogwarts, is scheduled to appear at the Wizengamot next week to answer the Floo Network Authority's accusation that Ms. Shin had created a private Floo-network in direct violation against ministry regulations.

Ms. Shin's family, which includes Grandmaster Shin June Hu, defended Ms. Shin's creation of the Magical Mobile Network (MMN), arguing the only point of similarity between the regular Floo Network and the MMN is the fact Floo-powder is used. Meanwhile, the popularity MMN continues to grow.

"Why didn't Jackie tell me about this?" growled John. Ever since Magic became a shared secret between Jackie, Ellen and John, the three of them started meeting separately on top of the regular Tuesday small group meetings to talk about the wizarding world and their magic children/magic careers.

"Probably decided to just let the Floo Network Authority have its way," said Sherlock, looking disgusted.

"But she worked so hard on it! Why would she do that?" said Harry indignantly.

John sighed deeply. "Because it's too much work."

"But Miss Jackie likes working so much, she-"

"If working began and ended in doing first-class research, Jacqueline would be the finest and most prolific scholar that ever lived," said Sherlock. "But Jacqueline has no ambition and no energy beyond that. She won't even go out of her way to formally present her own solutions, and would rather give her work away than take the trouble to prove herself right in front of a panel. Her

peers and even her mentors used to exploit this tendency and steal her work when she was still in school. The whole thing went public eventually and Jacqueline received her due credit, but the resulting scandal was so big she had to leave academia. Even now, she's incapable of laying out her work before other people."

Harry gaped. "So when she said she couldn't do the scholar route, it's because she couldn't deal with *other people* ?"

"Pretty much," said John. "Sherlock, wasn't it *you* who triggered the scandal?"

"I came across one of her research articles six years ago. It was published under someone else's name, but the reasoning process and wording was densely similar to two separate articles in completely different fields. Those articles were also published under different names, and none of the bibliographies sited each other. I eventually figured out the supposed researchers took Jacqueline's work without bothering to cross-check her other projects. I posted my findings in an internet forum, and the online community did the rest. Quite a few heads rolled in the aftermath."

"Serves them right," said Harry savagely. "That's the *worst* kind of stealing."

"Yes, I agree."

John texted Jacqueline while Harry and Sherlock soundly abused the non-magical academic world.

Jack, if you don't defend your work against the Floo Network Authority, I may do something drastic.

The reply came a lot quicker than expected.

Not you too. Why is everyone more worked up about this than I am?

Because it's not right. Just go to the hearing and explain what you did. It must be pretty obvious if your brothers can tell your network is different from regular Floo.

I suppose it's extremely unlikely the Floo Regulatory Panel uses an

Asus Laptop to regulate their network usage.

"How the bloody hell did she managed to connect *magical phones* to a *laptop* ?" John said incredulously whilst texting: *How does that work?* ! *Jack, explain this to me!*

John groaned when Jack replied: *Too long for text*

Fine. Have brunch with me this weekend? Ottelonghi at Upper Street. It's a date ;)

Jack didn't hesitate to reply: *Ok*

"Got a brunch date with Jack this Saturday," John informed the other two. "Don't blow up the flat while I'm gone."

"Are you going to video tape the explanation?" Harry asked too casually.

"Of course not," John huffed. "I'll just look clueless and she'll use her funny little analogies to help me understand. If I happened to relay the info to other people-say, Dumbledore or Jeremy- that's my business."

Harry giggled all the way through the remainder of his History of Magic essay.

For Harry, the visit to Sherlock and Mycroft's parents' residence in Yorkshire was the most mind-numbingly boring and nerve-wracking trip he'd ever had. There was nothing to do there except eat, sleep, read or go out for walks. It was unsettling to see Sherlock wear anything other than Bespoke, but apparently even *Mycroft* dressed casual when visiting their parents' home. The first day Sherlock showed up wearing jeans and t-shirt, John muttered "I'm a cougar," after staring at him for several beats. Sherlock retorted the way John chose to dress sometimes make him think he'd married a five-year-old whose parents had given up on, which would make him a paedophile. Jonn slugged him for that remark.

Sherlock's parents turned out to be quite normal, personality-wise. If

Harry didn't know who their sons were, he would've thought they were a normal retired couple living in the country, which made him wonder how Sherlock and Mycroft turned out the way they did. They were far from stupid, though. Harry had a tough time dodging their questions, because they were rarely satisfied with generic answers and had the inconvenient habit of remembering everything he said in perfect chronological order. Harry thought he'd blown it when Mr. Holmes pointed out he'd said he went to local comprehensive, but then later said he spent most of his time in Scotland.

"We *tried* sending him to a local comprehensive, but it was completely unsuitable," Sherlock clarified.

"Oh," said Mr. Holmes, blinking his blinded eyes (*the War*, Mycroft said), "Why Scotland and not Harrow?"

"His biological parents made arrangements so Harry would attend their old school in Scotland. We thought it would be a waste not to use it."

Sherlock sat Harry down and worked on his cover story after this exchange. Harry felt like a spy training to infiltrate hostile enemy territory as Sherlock grilled him over the details until he was satisfied Harry knew them all by heart. Harry kept his story firmly consistent afterwards, but from the sly, reptilian look on his face, Harry could tell (with a sinking feeling), Mycroft knew exactly what he was really doing.

The above episode turned out to be the most interesting thing that would happen to Harry in Yorkshire. Sherlock degenerated from irritated-bored to lethally-bored in 24 hours, so John had to constantly distract him before he started concocting dynamite for kicks. It was difficult to talk to Sherlock's parents, because their idea of small talk involved topics such as the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus and the relationship between the ancient Cornish language and Phoenician tin traders. In two days Mr. and Mrs. Holmes ran out of things to talk to Harry about, and just hovered awkwardly. Harry spent a lot of time roaming the deserted moors and heaths of Yorkshire, because the alternative was reading books in the Holmes private library where Mycroft was often found.

As expected, sharing in the same breathing space as Mycroft Holmes was as much fun as listening to Professor Binns drone on about goblin rebellions and as harrowing as double potions with Snape. Once Harry let it slip he played chess with his friends at Hogwarts, Mycroft always brought out the chess set when he stayed in the library. As he was defeated in five moves or less (usually less) for the umpteenth time, Harry wondered if he should take a leaf out of Sherlock's book and start blowing things up.

"It's so boring here," Harry complained to Julia over the magical mobile phone in the middle of the night when everyone was asleep. "I can't wait to get back to London. How was fishing?"

"Really nice. The waters were really clear, and there were a lot of fish to catch. We let most of them go, but Daddy kept a couple for dinner. Uncle Jason made Bisque. I gave mine to the dog."

"You didn't eat it?"

"I'm not putting fish in my mouth."

"Herbivore."

"City-boy."

"I'm no such thing, but whatever. How did Miss Jackie's Hearing go?"

"The Wizengamot ruled to her favour as soon as she showed them the laptop - tell your Mum thank you for the illustrated analogies, by the way, they really helped make her case - but now the Floo Regulation Panel is saying Aunt Jackie illegally charmed a Muggle artefact to create MMN. Never mind the only thing she'd done to the laptop magic-wise is to make it magic *-free* . The case is with the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office now, and it's not going to move forward until Mr. Weasley returns from his holiday."

Harry clicked his tongue irritably, "Sounds like they really don't want her to have the MMN, doesn't it?"

"Well, it's making a lot of money," said Julia reasonably. "There are already two hundred customers, and that's just Hogwarts students

who signed up for the basic subscription of five Galleons a month. At the rate the customer base is growing, Uncle Jeremy says revenue's going to double by the end of this year. Can you imagine how much you would make if every wizarding household in Great Britain had a magical mobile phone?"

Harry did the calculations in his head, and came up with a figure around several hundred of thousands of Galleons.

"No wonder they want a piece of it," he marvelled.

"Mmhmm. I'm pretty sure the Department of Magical Transportation is trying to replicate what she did. I say good luck-they're never going to figure it out until they learn how to operate a Microsoft SQL Server workshop."

They laughed. Julia entertained him by imitating the expressions on the Wizengamot members' faces when Miss Jackie told them pretty much all there was to know on how to create MMN.

"His eyebrows went like *this*, and then he pulled this kind of face," said Julia gleefully, putting on a gaping, highly baffled look. "It was funnier because he didn't have any hair."

"So you got to watch the hearing?"

"No, I wasn't allowed. I got to see the court room when Aunt Jackie activated a mobile phone to demonstrate."

They talked about what they were doing with the paychecks they got for help setting up MMN. Ron had used most his to buy a wand - fourteen inches, willow, containing one unicorn tail-hair - and then a gently used second-hand upright piano. Harry didn't know what to do with his, so he kept it in his Gringotts vault. Hermione exchanged hers to Muggle money and gave it to her parents.

"I think I'm going to buy a broom," said Julia. "My birthday is coming up, and Dad usually gives me money to buy myself a birthday present."

"No birthday party?"

"If only the criminals of London were so kind as to not commit serious crimes on the last week of July."

Harry smiled ruefully. "There's that. Hey-" he sat up straighter, "if you do end up buying one, d'you want to stop by and fly around a bit? This part of Yorkshire is pretty deserted and there're plenty of trees. I'm sure we won't get in trouble as long as we don't fly too high."

Julia looked excited. "Hebrides is pretty deserted too; Uncle Jeremy says you can fly here as high up as you want."

"Oh, that's perfect! We can take the Knight Bus to get there. The fare's only eleven sickles."

They promised to meet up in two days. Harry realized after ending the call he didn't know how he could go about asking permission to travel up to Hebrides. John and Sherlock rarely said no to his requests except when flying was involved. Then the answer was usually no, because John was tetchy about his EIA. Harry was certain he would be fine-he'd added both a warming charm and a water-repelling charm to his face mask. There was also Sherlock's parents and Mycroft to consider; Muggles didn't do day trips to Hebrides unless they were exceptionally motivated.

Harry pondered the problem until an idea came to mind…

Sherlock was reading the *Daily Prophet* while John napped next to him. He looked grim as he read the headlines:

BLACK STILL AT LARGE

Sirius Black, possibly the most infamous prisoner

ever to be held in Azkaban fortress, is still eluding

capture, the Ministry of Magic confirmed today.

"We are doing all we can to recapture Black," said the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, this morning, "and we beg the magical community to remain calm." *Fudge has been criticized by some members of the* International Federation of Warlocks for informing the Muggle Prime Minister of the crisis. *"Well, really, I had to, don't you know," said an* irritable Fudge. "Black is mad. He's a danger to anyone who crosses him, magic or Muggle. I have the Prime Minister's assurance that he will not breathe a word of Black's true identity to anyone. And let's face it- who'd believe him if he did?" *While Muggles have been told that Black is carrying* a gun (a kind of metal wand that Muggles use to kill each other), the magical community lives in fear of a massacre like that of twelve years ago, when Black murdered thirteen people with a single curse.

Above the article was a large magical photograph of a sunken-faced man with long, matted hair, who blinked slowly at Sherlock. Sherlock took a pair of scissors and snipped off just the article. He then set the copy of *Prophet* aside and pulled out a two-inch binder that served as his index for Magical World. He flipped over to the Fall of LV section and ran a long finger down the meticulously annotated timeline until he reached the section detailing Hagrid's account of

the fateful Halloween.

"… I picked him up meself. The house was almost destroyed, but I got him out all right before the Muggles started swarmin' around. Young Sirius Black lent me his flying motorcycle. He fell asleep as we was flyin' over Bristol."

He then moved to the Aftermath section. It only contained a few pages, and all of the paragraphs were about what happened to the followers and suspected followers of Lord Voldemort after he vanished. Under the B subsection, there was an entry for Black, Sirius:

Incarcerated in Azkaban on account of killing thirteen people with a single curse and for betraying James and Lily Potter's safe house location; betrayal considered particularly heinous due to the fact Sirius Black was believed to be James Potter's closest and most trusted friend; Snape states the friendship was merely based on mutual enablement of each other's bullying activities-considering the source, must be discerning.

Sherlock had just finished gluing the article under **Black, Sirius** when there was a knock on the door. Sherlock shut the binder and hid both it and the copy of the *Daily Prophet* under the covers.

"Yes?" he snapped.

The door opened and Madeleine Honouria Holmes, affectionately known as Mummy Holmes, peered in. Sherlock scratched an unwashed armpit rather pointedly.

"Yes, I know you're very busy," said Mummy Holmes calmly. "I hope you're almost done, because we have bit of a situation."

"How can we have a situation? Nothing happens here."

"That might be the problem," Mummy Holmes replied. "Harry has been a dear, but I think he reached his limit when it comes to boredom. He's taken matters into his own hands."

Sherlock frowned at her.

"He replaced himself with a living mirror-copy of himself," she explained. "He's also moving around in Hebrides at impossible speeds. Plausibility of these acts aside, I'm pretty sure you didn't give him permission to do them."

Final Notes : I almost didn't make it this week. I was deeply distracted by two side-stories for ASIM. One I may post, the other I never will. They are around 4000 and 5000 words long respectively. 9000+ words I could've used for ASIM, but since when did creative process work like that? ;)

Harry is a teenager. Alas, poor Sherlock.

I'd like to take the time now to say a huge thank you to all the readers who reviewed ASIM. I'm always encouraged when readers take the time to remark upon my stories. I'd love to respond individually, but most of my spare time-and not-so-spare time-is taken up on writing ASIM. I'll be out running a half-marathon on the second week of October, so don't be surprised if I don't update that week. Happy Reading!

Fissures

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty: Fissures

John woke up to a sudden chill and Mrs. Holmes commanding: "Calm yourself, Sherlock, and then explain."

"Stupid, stupid, *stupid* !" Sherlock snarled as he paced furiously. "How could he commit such an elementary mistake? Mother, what tipped you off? No, don't tell me, it was the scar wasn't it?"

"It was actually the mole on his neck. It switched from left to right."

"Of course it was."

"You realize I have little idea of the true nature of the situation."

"But not completely without a clue."

"Mycroft warned me there is more to Harry than meets the eye. I didn't realize he meant it this way."

John brought back the covers Sherlock had flung off in his agitation. "What's going on?"

"Harry decided to go on a joyride up in Hebrides!" Sherlock shouted.

It took a moment for John to unravel the statement.

"Gone up to meet Julia, has he?"

Both Sherlock and Mrs. Holmes stared at John in astonishment. John looked balefully back.

"I heard Harry phoning his friends almost every night," John explained. "Advanced levels of cabin fever, constant boredom, and teenage immortality syndrome usually equal some form of delinquency. Given Harry's track-record, my bet is skiving to meet friends, one whom which spent a holiday in Hebrides and enjoyed it very much."

The corners of Mrs. Holmes' eyes crinkled.

"I'm starting to see her charms, dear."

Oh, gee, thanks, John didn't say. "So how did you figure out Harry is in *Hebrides* ? GPS chip in his shoe?"

"Knowing Mycroft's latest projects on the matter: doubtful. I'm inclined to think he replaced one of Harry's pills."

John prayed for strength.

"Right. I'm not going to comment on the sheer creepiness of what you just said. Can you please give me a moment? I need to calm myself before I commit some serious acts of domestic violence. And for G-d's sake, Sherlock, wear something!"

Mrs. Holmes courteously left the room. Sherlock did no such thing.

"What made you think to eavesdrop into Harry's phone calls?" Sherlock asked, throwing on some clothes.

"He was restless and rattling the house by the sheer force of his sighs. It was only a matter of time before he did something stupid to amuse himself. In case you've forgotten, Sherlock, 'Army Doctor' covers most of my CV."

Sherlock looked confused.

"I gave up the notion young men twenty-years-old or younger can be sensible after I saw a group of Privates in their twenties try to skateboard on tent tops," John look at him pointedly. " *Canvas* tent tops."

"But considering what was going on each night-"

"Sherlock, you can't distract me by your physical attributes alone because you're not my type at all. I prefer men more rugged and the size and stature of Lestrade."

John laughed at the expression of pure affront on Sherlock's face.

"Lucky for you, I don't rank physical charm high up in my evaluation of men. Their suitability for relationships was usually inversely proportional to their level of physical attractiveness."

Sherlock continued to look offended and even slightly hurt. John could come up with no good reason while looking a pair of socks. Didn't Sherlock always maintain his body was only transport? John shrugged and finished dressing.

"Okay. I'm going to beat up your brother now. Want to join me?"

Sherlock looked slightly mollified when they left. Right outside in the hallway, they accost Sherlock's father. He looked rather lost blinking at a painting he couldn't see. Sherlock pushed John ahead, ignoring him as always, and Mr. Holmes ignored them right back.

They found Mycroft in the private library. Mycroft shut the hardcover he was reading with a theatrical snap and put on the most supercilious smile. He retracted it when John pointed his umbrella at him (they'd picked it up on the way).

" ' *There is more to Harry than meets the eye* '?" said John as the opening liner.

"I have thought you would be more concerned about his activities than about this," said Mycroft.

"There's thing called texting. Friends use it to communicate each other and, if they have children, gossip about their shenanigans."

"Ah, yes, the Detective Inspector," Mycroft sniffed delicately. "I do believe he is currently apoplectic with rage and shouting abuse at his brothers-in-law for putting dangerous ideas in his daughter. The two young men in question are bemused and appear to be taking the incident as though the children had snuck off to ride a bicycle."

"From their perspective, it may as well be."

"And your perspective of the incident agrees with theirs." Mycroft hummed thoughtfully, "How interesting."

John folded her arms and waited. Both Holmes brothers studied John carefully.

"It's a matter of cost-benefit analysis," said Mycroft at length. "The status quo has been in place for so long that even though the secret is no longer such a complete one as it was a decade ago, it is far more costly to do something about it than it is to not."

"Like Bond Air?" Sherlock mocked.

"Yes, like that particular fiasco you almost completely botched had not John intervened," snapped Mycroft.

John let out a loud sigh to interrupt the cat-fight. "What do you want from him?"

"Who is this 'him' you speak of?" asked Mycroft coyly.

John tapped the umbrella against the floor rather forcefully.

"Why do you think *I* want something from him?" Mycroft retorted. "I have determined long ago that he is quite unsuitable to my line of work. He cannot lie, not convincingly, and his forthrightness makes him an appalling politician. He is very much like you, John, and his earnest desire to become more like you has exacerbated the disappointing state of affairs."

"Stop saying such horribly short-sighted things, Mycroft. Harry is a godsend."

The three of them whirled around and found Mr. Holmes seated at

the chair next to the door with his wife at his elbow. John had no idea how they got in so silently.

"Must you?" Sherlock groused.

The cocked eyebrow and condescending gaze (albeit blind) Mr. Holmes put on was so like Sherlock when he interacted with the police, it was terrifying.

"Time to improve your spatial awareness, don't you think?" drawled Mr. Holmes.

John grabbed hold of Sherlock's bicep before he could start a tirade. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Holmes laced his long fingers at the tips and brought them to his chin.

"The Others are an ignorable if irritating problem as long as they are content to keep to themselves and our own kind have the necessary self-absorption to let them be. But the Others have been infringing upon our society since the Cold War. There have been hints of this during the Second World War, but that was before my time and more concentrated in the Continent. The invasion *I* observed was far more insidious. The number of people that died or vanished alone outstrips the victims from the War by a considerable amount-and this is just Great Britain. How many was it, dear?"

"Acton, McDougal, Timberlain, Williamson, Lewis, Lewis, Peters, Phelps…"

"… I asked for a number, dear, not a list of names."

"Oh, hush, you know I never remember numbers and figures. Just names and faces. Oberstein, Freeman, Wallington, Gordon, Beecher, Marvell, Cushing, Moffat…"

"You remember all of them?" asked John wonderingly as Mr. Holmes sighed impatiently and Mrs. Holmes continued to list names.

"Only the ones he was called to investigate," said Mrs. Holmes, poking her husband's shoulder. "That's how we met, by the way.

Caleb got too close and returned one day without his sight or memory of the whole incident. I became his eyes, and then his wife."

"Okay. So when you said 'War', it was…"

"The Cold War. The invisible Other War. It doesn't matter either way," said Mr. Holmes dismissively. "I got off lightly. My fellows were not so fortunate. Holdhurst spent the rest of his days thinking he was a chamber pot."

John winced.

"But the gross infringement died down for the last decade," said Sherlock. "It must have."

"Yes, after a week of shooting stars in Kent, flocks of owls travelling to and fro across the country in broad daylight, and men and women in cloaks, robes and witches hats wandering the streets celebrating about twelve years ago," said Mycroft sardonically. "We do keep track of these things."

John felt cold. Not because Mycroft knew about the Magic world, that was expected, but because every time Mycroft put his sticky fingers into something, all the wonderment and joy seem to vanish at its wake. The thought of wizards and witches like Arthur and Molly forced to dismantle their culture to avoid Government sanctioned witch hunts was too horrible to bear.

"Right," said John, squaring her shoulders. "Cost-benefit analysis: It's extremely difficult and costly to dismantle a whole group of people very determined to keep their way of living, who also have to ability to fight back. Best to leave them alone as is as long as they stay out of trouble. Perfectly sound and understandable decision."

"But," Sherlock said.

John wasn't aware there was a 'but' to belabour, but it made her rethink.

"You don't think the status quo can continue."

"Naturally not," said Mycroft. "CCTV alone is quite difficult to deal

with."

"Yeah, but you're already doing something about it. Otherwise the internets would've blown up by now," said John. Then something clicked. "Sir, you said the, um, *Others* are an ignorable if irritating problem as long as they are content to keep to themselves and our kind lets them be. The Others are keeping up their part of the deal. Does this mean…?"

Mr. Holmes nodded. His vacant eyes were very unsettling to look at; they were so clouded over, it was as if he had neither pupils nor irises, just whites.

"One of the consequences of our current day's thorough-going scepticism and disinclination to think carefully is that the common person is sceptical of even ideas on which he or she could get a sense of their own identity. The problem, then, is not that the person believes in *nothing* -"

"-but they start to believe in *anything*, which is far worse," said John, completing the sentence.

Mr. Holmes gave John a one-sided smirk, just like his sons were wont to when John had done something unexpectedly clever.

"You are not as limited to popular literature as I was led to believe," he said. "But yes, that is quite true - and G.K. Chesterton remains prophetic as always. Now here is the fallout based on the current cultural climate: Is there not a term for a certain internet phenomenon? 'Going viral,' I believe it is called. It would only take one video - just one - to 'go viral' and trigger a cascade of reaction all around the globe. More witnesses will come out of the woodwork and enflame sentiments. Some will welcome the Others the same way some people welcome the notion of ghosts and UFOs. Most will react in fear and lash out. There will be great division of opinions. Mediation will be impossible once certain religious groups get involved. The Others will scramble to stem the tide, and if they use their usual method of hiding - and there is no reason to think they would not - public opinion against the Others would increase exponentially as those who initially welcomed them would feel betrayed, and hell hath no fury like those who feel as though their

'friends' had betrayed them. Also, the whole point of thorough-going Scepticism is that one violently rejects the idea of an external party 'forcing' its ideals on oneself - as if it doesn't occur every time you view media, but nevertheless - and believe the right to believe in whatever one wishes, no matter how foolish. That the Others can and will remove one's memory as if it were pesky rubbish, and have means in which to implant false ideas into one's mind, will not go over well. At which point the Government will have to take very forceful measures."

John said nothing. The bleak picture Mr. Holmes painted was all too plausible.

"The best way to counter this pre-emptively before it happens," Mr. Holmes continued, "Is to make the gap between the Others and Us shorter. A cultural revolution, where the Others start to look and act more like Us. It need not be as thorough. A change in attire alone would be quite helpful."

John thought of the various ways in which inexperienced magicals had tried to pass themselves as non-magicals and involuntarily snorted as the image of a pair wizards, one who wore a tweed suit with thigh-length galoshes, and his colleague, in a frock coat and spats over a striped one-piece bathing costume, sprang immediately to mind.

"You want a Cultural Icon," said Sherlock, his face mask-like.

"One whom people wish to imitate," Mycroft agreed. "The younger the better-the young are more easily influenced."

John knew exactly where this was going. "No . "

"Be reasonable, John," Mycroft crooned. "You don't want the worst case scenario to happen, now, do you? Harry is in the best position to become one. He is already very important to them."

" *No*," said John stubbornly. The idea of making Harry a wizard teenage idol of sorts was not just absurd-it spelled certain disaster. John still had nightmares of examining the cupboard under the stairs where Harry had spent nine years of his life like some forgotten

boot. The smell inside there alone had brought flashbacks of Iraq; John had had to sit down to quell the urge to vomit or whip out a pistol and start shooting things. The memory of rocking Harry to sleep when he was still a tiny wisp of a boy who barely weighed anything and his height at the very bottom of the growth scale still burned brightly in John's mind. Even now, John thought bitterly, for all the recovery he'd made and all the growth he achieved, Harry was still short, skinny and hesitant around a crowd full of strangers, preferring anonymity to acknowledgement because any and all attention he received most of his life was negative. Forcing him into the spotlight and media scrutiny would damage him beyond measure. No-just *no* .

"It is also a matter of *International* importance," Mycroft argued. "Surely you see some sacrifices must be-"

John snapped.

"Well, *F- you*, I'm his mother," John glared at the Holmeses, all shocked to a person. "Go find someone else. I'm done here. Nice talking to you."

John marched out.

Sherlock caught up outside the house, where John was heaving with fury.

"Don't listen to Mycroft. He only thinks he knows best," Sherlock said.

John calmed down a bit. "Right now I hate your brother with a passion of a thousand burning suns. It's just my luck personal dislike has no bearing when it comes to how I ought to treat people."

Sherlock huffed, "You and your morals."

"F- you too," snapped John without any bite. After drawing a huge breath, John changed subjects. "Better go find the spot Harry summoned the Knight Bus. Think you can track it down?"

"Of course."

"Let's go then."

They headed off to the moors. John caught a glimpse of Sherlock's parents standing shoulder to shoulder by a window, watching them. For once, John could see what Sherlock was seeing-the years in the army weren't spent just doing MO things-as they tracked Harry's walk into a densely wooded area where it abruptly ended in front of a set of bus tire tracks. John figured Harry came here in the early hours of the morning, and planned to return at around lunchtime to pretend he'd been out on his roaming walks as usual. They had a couple of hours until then, so John and Sherlock sat under a tree.

"Harry may not have much choice in the matter," said Sherlock abruptly after a period of silence. "Voldemort is still alive out there, scheming for a comeback, unrelenting even after spending over a decade as a disembodied spirit. If his ideology weren't so vile, I would've been tempted to admire his sheer tenacity."

" *Don't*," John pleaded. "I'm not denying it, okay? I'm just saying we don't have to deal with it *right now* . We can deal when the time comes. Let him enjoy life for once, and just worry about stupid things like homework and music lessons and maybe a crush or two. *Just not now* ."

They fell back into silence. Sherlock, incredibly, fell into a light sleep of sorts with his hand curled around John's elbow. John basked in the sunlight and listened to the birds sing.

Right around noon, there was a huge BANG and an outrageously purple triple-decker bus appeared out of thin air several stone throws away. It rolled to a heaving stop after a few yards. The side-door opened, and Harry stumbled out, carrying his broom on his shoulder and his jacket bulging where he'd stashed his invisibility cloak.

Harry paled when he noticed John marching towards his direction. As John stopped in front of him, arms crossed, John realized with a pang there was only an inch difference between her and Harry. *When did you grow up so much?*

"Errr," Harry stuttered.

"Young man," John interrupted. "You are in a biiiig trouble."

"Sorry, I have to take this," said Lestrade to the doctor Donovan was discreetly ogling. His mobile had flashed John's number just as he led the young man inside his office after Lestrade found him wandering around the lobby. The man made beeline to Lestrade saying he was a doctor and had a serious situation to report. Normally he'd let John wait without guilt, but Lestrade wasn't sure how long he was going last without the Baker Street duo when there was a prison escapee who had a gun the Home Office was *very keen* on catching on top of the usual workload and his ex-in-laws fighting each other daily.

The last bit made Lestrade wilt like… like *something* . Metaphors were not his forte. All he could say was that these days he felt like fleeing with his ears covered whenever he stopped by Jackie's place, normally a place of refuge (once you got over the I'm-going-to-get-killed feeling at the driveway). Just this morning the three Shin men aligned themselves against Jack, whose health had deteriorated-again.

"Take it off," Jack had demanded from the sofa where she'd been convalescing for the last three days, referring to the *Langlock* curse one of them put on her to make sure she wouldn't verbally agree to any suggestion that remotely let the Ministry of Magic have control over her magical mobile phone related inventions (a brilliant piece of work, it really would be a shame if the government screwed it over, but was it worth Jack getting sick over?).

"No. Not unless you promise not to hand over MMN to the Floo Network Authorities," growled Jeremy.

Jack's lips drew into a thin line.

"I'm not some wind toy you can shut the mouth of whenever I say something disagreeable to you," she snapped.

"That's not why I did it!" Jeremy shouted. "I'm sick of you giving up before trying!"

"So you force me to not ' *give up* '."

"We wouldn't have to do this if you didn't fold every time you deal with *people*," Jeremy snarled. "Stop being such a coward and just *face* them!"

Jack went white at the cruel jab. Lestrade felt torn between wanting to break Jeremy's nose or just cringe.

"Of course. You're right," Jack muttered, turning away from her brothers. "I'm a complete utter coward. Thank you for the reminder. I'll make sure you remain correct and be so cowardly that I'll *refuse* to change for any reason . "

Jeremy shrank and Mr. Shin sprang to his feet. For a good reason; when Jack threatened to do something, she *did it* .

"Sorry, that was uncalled for," Jeremy muttered.

"You were just speaking the truth," said Jack, facing the sofa back cushion.

Jeremy winced. "I said I was sorry."

Jack didn't turn around. Stalemate.

"Look, we can talk about this later," said Jason desperately. "The next hearing isn't until mid-August. You need be ready for that. You need to *eat* ."

"I'm not hungry."

" *Please… !* You're fifteen pounds underweight! Just eat something-anything!" Jason begged.

"Not. Hungry."

Jason swallowed. "Nuna-"

" *No*," Jack said between gritted teeth.

"All you've been doing is drink water," Jason whispered, on a verge

of tears. "Or eat a bit of gruel. You-"

" *I don't have an eating disorder* !" yelled Jack, lashing out, a very rare thing indeed, and her trembling increased because of the amount of effort it required. "And don't even mention Magic Enhancement Therapy! I'd rather die than go through that again!"

Lestrade fled as soon as he saw the look of despair on his father-in-law's face, because he was an utter coward when it came down to it. Everything he knew about keeping good family relations he'd learned from the Shins. What do you do when that very family was having relational troubles? He had two failed marriages and didn't have a proper family growing up. All he'd done in the past-and still would do, knowing him-was flounder helplessly as his latest family disintegrated.

Lestrade forced the painful remembrance away as he opened the line, "Yeah?"

" *Incoming*," said John without ado, "Himself wants to know more about Sirius Black."

"Tell him I want to know more about him too," Lestrade growled. "The Super is breathing down all our necks and the Home Office sounds like an overturn beehive."

"Read the *Prophet* lately?"

"I object to things that move when they're not supposed to."

"Only in your limited mind, Lestrade," he heard Sherlock say.

"Shut up," Lestrade snapped. "For that I'm going to make you wait. Don't enter my office until I'm done."

"We'll be there in two minutes," said John after a swift slapping sound and muffled giggles. Lestrade felt his heart sink when he realized Harry was with them. That meant only one thing: *Wizards. Why did it have to be wizards?*

Lestrade ended the call, stuffed his mobile back into his pocket and let out a soul-wrenching sigh.

"Sorry about that. So you were saying?"

The doctor, a rather handsome fellow who really didn't look much like a medical professional to be honest, more like someone who ought to have been born five hundred years ago as a samurai, slowly tilted his head to one side and studied Lestrade intently. Lestrade had a feeling he was being x-rayed.

"You haven't been sleeping and your sugar and caffeine consumption doubled," he said in a American accent.

Lestrade coughed awkwardly. "Yeah, well, it's been busy around the office."

"In other words, you did what needed to be done," said the doctor, tilting his head to the other side, staring at him unblinkingly.

"About that situation you wanted to report?" asked Lestrade loudly, before the doctor would announce he should expect the onset of type II diabetes and hypertension the way he was going.

The doctor sat up straight. "Someone is poisoning the patients," he said in quiet indignation.

"Okay," said Lestrade, pen and notebook out. "Please give me the details."

The doctor opened his mouth to speak, but his office door flung open and Sherlock swanned in like he owned the place. Lestrade swore under his breath.

" *You are lying to me*," Sherlock accused like a vengeful god.

Lestrade was about to tell him to piss off, he was doing no such thing and he had no time for this, but the person who entered after Sherlock halted them all in their tracks.

" *Robert* ?" John breathed, shock and raw emotion bleeding out of each syllable.

The silence that followed felt like a courtroom after a death sentence was announced.

The doctor-Robert-stared at John like he'd seen a ghost. John stared back, looking pale and vulnerable. Harry switched between staring at John, Dr. Robert, and then back again, looking curious and deeply uneasy. It was hard to decipher the look on Sherlock's face except for one thing-he looked like a lost and bewildered child.

Lestrade set his pen down and covered his face in his hands. He then prayed to the God he knew existed but never paid much attention to because he was a prat like that.

Please, no more drama. Please, please, please*, no more drama…*

Harry saw the moment John shrug off whatever earth-shattering shock that rocked the foundations. It was impressive to witness the transformation; a brief intake of breath, closing of eyes, standing in soldierly attention, and then setting the expression to a guarded but friendly look.

"I thought you were at Johns Hopkins," John said.

"You Brits invited me," said Dr. Robert. Something about his expression strongly reminded Harry of Mr. Shin.

"A lot of desperate patients?" said John lightly before turning to Mr. Lestrade and Sherlock. "Everyone, this is Dr. Robert D. Ju. Best damn doctor in the world, full stop. Robert, do you want to know who everyone is?"

"No," said Dr. Ju without rancour or missing a beat. "I have patients who are dying."

Sherlock looked at Dr. Ju keenly. Mr. Lestrade looked startled.

"I see your priorities haven't changed," said John. "Go on. Tell Lestrade how they are dying. Lestrade, you better listen, because he's going to be right."

Mr. Lestrade hastily retook his pen.

"First, there's been a slew of regular theft in the pathology

department," Dr. Ju began. "Skin samples, from eight different patients. Date of thefts: Tuesdays and Thursdays each week, dating back to the first week of June. The thief never took entire samples, but for each theft the necessary preservative was taken too. Second, all the aforementioned patients' conditions deteriorated rapidly, though their skin quality improved. One of them actually died. Here the obituary." He slapped a newspaper clipping on the desk. "All the patients were getting ready for a skin graft. The dead one had soft-baby skin before she bit the dust, which, of course, doesn't make any sense."

"Go and make your arrest, Inspector, he practically solved the case for you," drawled Sherlock. "It looks like there's a killer among the staff. Regular dates suggest shifts. Ability to properly handle the transport of samples without suspicion implies lab technician. Examine the shift schedules and you'll have your culprit."

"Circumstantial evidence," Mr. Lestrade pointed out.

" *Strong* circumstantial evidence," Sherlock argued back.

"The name I wrote down on the back of the clipping may interest you," said Dr. Ju. "I need you to find out who, why, how and what. I'd rather do it myself, but I'm just a guest doctor; I can't demand a tox screen for patients not assigned to me."

"Why not?" said Sherlock.

"I know, right?" Dr. Ju exclaimed, flinging his hands up. "You'd think the hospital would be more reasonable about it. Like, *hello*, why would I ask for a tox screen if I didn't think the patient was being poisoned? But noooo, all they do is give me is this *look* : please stop nosing into other doctor's business and do your own job please, Dr. smelly cow poo, and Iiii wouldn't do that if I were you," he said suddenly to Sergeant Donovan, who'd walked in to pick up printouts. "You don't want to touch ink before you go- find Nemo between the trenches."

Mr. Lestrade and Sergeant Donovan stared at Dr. Ju incredulously. Sherlock, on the other hand, his eyes were sparkling.

"It doesn't help the poison isn't the regular kind of poison either, and I don't mean depleted uranium," Dr. Ju went on, switching gears abruptly back to the topic of dying patients. "Go to the hospital and you'll know what I mean. Okay." He stood up. "Hi, nice to meet you. What are your names?"

Dr. Ju stood with his hand outstretched for three stunned seconds.

"Detective Inspector Lestrade, Sergeant Sally Donovan, Harry Watson, Sherlock Holmes," said John, pointing out people and saying their names.

"Pleasure, charmed," said Dr. Ju in twitchy sort of monotone. He looked at Sherlock, "New boyfriend? He's not your usual type."

"No, that's not it," said John, raising the left hand. "We're married."

Dr. Ju turned his face to John a tiny fraction at a time, his large eyes framed with ridiculously long lashes blown wide and blinking for each minute turn of his neck. He looked up for a moment and a tiny frown wrinkled his face, like he just remembered something. Then he jerked his attention back to John.

"Congratulations? Yes, congratulations. For the-marriage," Dr. Ju screwed his eyes shut, like he was trying to figure out the exact wording he was supposed to use in a foreign language he was only half-familiar with. "I wish you many happy years and… nice children and-"

"Okay, you can stop there," said John. "You're getting better at normal human interaction."

"You're a liar, but a kind one."

"You're even started harbouring sympathy towards mankind, too."

"I'm *not* !" exclaimed Dr. Ju, looking very disgusted.

"Being the best doctor in the world doesn't make you like the patients-or people in general," said John by-way of explanation.

"You would despise the great mass of humanity, too, if you really

know what's going inside their heads," Dr. Ju muttered. "That's all. Now excuse me, I want to tarnish my soul with some therapeutic swearing. Bye."

He lunged for the office door, like he couldn't get out fast enough. But then Dr. Ju stopped abruptly right outside the glass wall office, and backtracked a few steps.

"Hailey, start your son on a light cardio regimen, it will help his asthma. Don't worry about your sugar intake, Detective Inspector; you really *are* doing what needs to be done. Just substitute the sweet pastries to chocolate and you'll be fine. And *you,* " Dr. Ju pointed an accusing finger at Sherlock, "start on a good marathoner's diet. The irregular meals are actually turning you stupid. Okay, I'm really leaving now. Peace!"

Then Dr. Ju went on his way.

As soon as he vanished from the premises, everyone stared at John.

"Yeah," said John, nodding. "He's always like that."

Final Notes : I have a bit of a dilemma: Shorter chapters (3000 to 4000 words), but quicker updates (three days), or extremely long chapters (11k+ probably) with eight to fifteen days between updates? ASIM-PA has a very complex plotline, with shorter break down in plot points than ASIM-CS. This means very long chapters if I keep a weekly-ish schedule. Let me know!

Uncomfortable Truths

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty One: Uncomfortable Truths

Harry sat for a long time trying to make sense of the world after Robert D. Ju happened. Judging from the incredulous look on his face, poor Mr. Lestrade was doing the same thing. As for Sherlock and John, John looked unperturbed and Sherlock appeared to be deeply offended that there was someone weirder and more attention grabbing than him.

"So which ex-boyfriend is he?" Mr. Lestrade asked after collecting his bearings.

"Your face looks really good for punching, did you know that?" said John.

Mr. Lestrade was unrepentant. "Can't be number five, he has the wrong occupation and he didn't sound like a New Yorker. The other ones were from the wrong side of the continent-"

" *Five* ?" Harry blurted.

"-he must be the ex-fiancé then," Mr. Lestrade finished.

Sergeant Donovan let out a derisive snort.

John did an eye roll. "Piss off. You just caught him at the worst possible moment. And stop gossiping with your wife, Lestrade, or my next blog entry is going to be about that incident at your Honeymoon."

Sergeant Donovan displayed horrified interest as Mr. Lestrade turned puce. Sherlock, on the other hand, was scowling fiercely.

"You and he were *engaged* ."

"Several years back, yeah," John paused. "It didn't work out, obviously."

Sherlock continued to scowl. "Who initiated the break-up?"

"Not going to talk about it here," said John loudly.

The temperature in Mr. Lestrade's office seemed to drop several degrees as John and Sherlock glared at each other. Sergeant Donovan took the better part of valour and fled. Mr. Lestrade, who was stuck, looked like he truly regretted opening his mouth.

"Okay, sorry I even brought it up," said Mr. Lestrade, looking really tired. "So you wanted to know more about Sirius Black?"

Sherlock reluctantly tore his attention away, which surprised Harry. He expected Sherlock to snap his focus back to the case the moment Mr. Lestrade mentioned the escaped prisoner.

"When did you hear about Black?"

"Second week of July."

"Did the Home Office mention what he was convicted of?"

"Nah. We're kind of assuming he had ties to IRA bombings back in the nineties."

"Well, you are wrong. He has ties to the Others."

Mr. Lestrade reluctantly reviewed the two copies of the *Daily Prophet* articles Sherlock slapped on to his desk.

"As if the IRA wasn't enough," he said at length. "What do you need me for? I'm more clueless than you."

"I need to question someone who has insider information in the Ministry of Magic."

"Don't you have Arthur Weasley for that? No, wait, he's on a holiday…"

"Your ex-father-in-law, Lestrade," said Sherlock impatiently. "He's a Ministry of Magic member, and the head of the Department of *Mysteries* ."

Five minutes later Mr. Lestrade was driving them over to Mr. Shin's home.

"I'm warning you right now, my father-in-law is in a fine mood," Mr. Lestrade growled. "Whatever you do, don't piss him off. Actually, you know what, I'll do the talking. You shut up."

"You never ask the right questions," said Sherlock petulantly.

"You don't know my FIL," Mr. Lestrade retorted. "You're going *wish* he's just going to turn you into a toad when he's really angry."

Mr. Lestrade asked Harry about his holiday in Yorkshire rather pointedly after this. Harry let out a gusting sigh and massaged his still aching muscles. As punishment for skiving off to Hebrides, John had put him through two hours of Army drill training. It had been three days since then and it was still painful to move sometimes.

"Boring as hell, yeah?" said Mr. Lestrade knowingly. "Are you still in disgrace for your Hebrides trip?"

"No," said Harry, looking down in embarrassment. "Er, is Julia…?"

"She was grounded," said Mr. Lestrade gravely. "And I confiscated her broom and phone. She's not getting them back until Jack gives me the green light."

They pulled over at a modest house near the University towns. Harry had a distinct feeling of being watched as they stepped out of

the car and the hairs on the back of his neck prickled as they approached the front door.

Mr. Lestrade noticed Harry's twitchiness.

"You feel that?"

"Feel *what* ?" asked Sherlock sharply.

"Something like killing intent?" said Mr. Lestrade, waving his hand around. "John, you don't feel it either?"

"Nope," said John.

Mr. Lestrade furrowed his brow, looking very troubled. John and Sherlock shared a look. Harry knew what it meant for once. The three of them had a theory Mr. Lestrade was either an *extremely* late-blooming wizard or a Squib (the snide comments Sherlock made about the former earned him a pummelling). They never mention it to Mr. Lestrade because both options were bad news considering his general unease towards Magic and which pureblood wizard family he was likely member of; all the Lestranges they uncovered were either dead or sentenced to life in prison for actively supporting Voldemort ("Makes you wonder what would've happened if he was raised by his own family," John remarked). Definitely not something you casually bring up over tea.

Mr. Lestrade rang the bell. The door creaked open a fraction and a wane looking Mr. Shin peered out. He frowned (up) at Mr. Lestrade, John, Sherlock, Harry, and then drooped.

"This is about Sirius Black, is it not?"

"Sorry, sir," Mr. Lestrade mumbled, "duty calls."

Mr. Shin let them in, grumbling.

Harry stared at the interior as soon as he stepped in. The hardwood floor parlour was a step above the tiled entryway, and could comfortably fit a group of twenty people. The walls weren't papered, but painted egg-shell white. Furniture was sparse, and the few present were made of polished wood of fine craftsmanship, some

possessing decorative ironwork around the edges. Potted plants and Jade-blue porcelain vases were placed here and there, some of the vases holding flowers, some paintings, calligraphy or lithographic patterns on their bodies, others none at all. After taking in the sight, Harry moved to enter the parlour, but then he realized Mr. Lestrade had taken off his shoes and left them behind before he stepped into the raised foyer. Harry hastily followed his example and took off his converses.

Harry tried not to slip on the polished wood floors as he followed after Mr. Shin in his socked feet, keenly aware there was a hole where his left big toe was. Mr. Shin opened a hinged door off the side of an airy living room that a very low table surrounded by six square cushions made of silk that had embroidery work depicting cranes, streams and pine trees in the centre. There was a small, cosy room behind the hinged door. It was furnished like the Muggle dining rooms Harry was used to, with a six-light chandelier on the ceiling, a circular table that had a white tablecloth thrown on top, wood frame chairs with cushions, and an oak showcase on the side.

"I'll put the kettle on," said Mr. Shin ironically as they took their seats.

Mr. Shin jabbed a finger at the chandelier and it lit up. He then opened the showcase, made beckoning gestures, and the tea set inside bobbled over to the table. After closing the showcase, Mr. Shin made a causal upward flicking motion. The sugar bowl filled itself with sugar cubes, the creamer with cream, biscuits piled on top of the platter, and the teapot stared steaming. John lifted the teapot cover and revealed it was full of tea, nice and hot.

"How do you do this?" said John wonderingly as Mr. Lestrade and Harry stared, open mouthed and mesmerized. Mr. Shin and Sherlock pulled their faces.

"It's not as hard as other magical people make it out to be," grumbled Mr. Shin like an extremely reluctant and grumpy magician who was forced to perform tricks against his will. "So you have questions."

Sherlock opened his mouth immediately, but John dug fingers into

his thigh as a warning.

"What can you tell us about the manhunt to catch Sirius Black?" asked Mr. Lestrade while Sherlock fumed.

"All hands in the Ministry have been pulled from their regular jobs to try and find him," said Mr. Shin.

"Any luck?"

"None."

"How did Black get out of prison?" asked Mr. Lestrade. "What kind of prison is Azkaban anyway?"

"We don't know," said Mr. Shin as he spooned sugar into his tea. "Azkaban was supposed to be unbreakable."

"High security prison, I take it?" said John.

Mr. Shin set his teaspoon on his saucer and cradled the teacup between his hands.

"Only the worst criminals are kept in Azkaban," he said. "The prison is a stone fortress on a small island, far off in the North Sea. But what keep the prisoners inside are not the walls or waters. It is the Azkaban guards."

"The Dementors?" said Sherlock sharply, which earned a glare from John.

Mr. Shin nodded.

"What kind of creatures are they?" asked John. "The only reference we found said they can suck out your soul."

Mr. Lestrade blanched as Mr. Shin's face turned more darkly mournful still.

"They are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places. They glory in decay and despair, and drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them.

Get too close to a Dementor and every good feeling every happy memory you possess will be sucked out of you. Spend too much time in their influence, and you will turn into something like them: soulless and evil. Plenty of Azkaban prisoners go mad in weeks, while others simply despair and die."

The four non-Shins sat in a disturbed silence.

"Guantanamo Bay sounds like a walk in the park in comparison," muttered John, pale and white lipped.

"Both are horrible in their own way," said Mr. Shin quietly. "Sirius Black has been incarcerated in Azkaban for almost twelve years. Dementors are supposed to drain a wizard of his powers if he is left with them for too long. Therefore he shouldn't have been able to escape without help. Yet here we are."

"So either he had help or he found a way to resist the Dementor's influence on his own," said Mr. Lestrade thoughtfully. "But why wait for so long to break out? What made him try now?"

"Yes, that is the question, is it not?" said Mr. Shin, clasping his hands under his chin. "Something motivated him, and it wasn't something that made him feel hopeful or happy. But it was strong enough to move a man who wasted more than a decade into action. Know what that motivation is, and you will know what he is trying to do right now. But the Ministry is not asking this question."

Sherlock considered it.

"Bitterness is a paralytic. Love is much more vicious motivator. Love is not an emotion, though it can produce and manifest a myriad of them. Among the negative options, jealousy is one, anger is another. Jealousy is too trivial for this kind of undertaking. Anger then."

"Yes, that sounds more reasonable," Mr. Shin agreed. "But what made him angry?"

Sherlock clicked his tongue irritably. "Data! I need more *data* ! I can't make bricks without clay!"

"What kind of data do you need?" asked Mr. Shin.

"Everything related to Black during the days before he escaped Azkaban: His activities, mental state, visitors, prison inspections, *anything* ."

"I'll see what I can do."

"You don't have the authority to look up this sort of thing?" asked Mr. Lestrade.

"The Department of Mysteries is not what you think," said Mr. Shin. "You need to take the word 'Mystery' more woodenly."

Harry, John, Sherlock and Mr. Lestrade stared at him.

"The Department of Mysteries study *Mysteries*," said Mr. Shin simply, "The mystery that is *Death;* the mystery that is *Love* ; Time; Space; Prophecies; that sort of thing."

" *Ooooh*," said Mr. Lestrade, dazed.

"Wait, hang on. Are you saying there are such things as real *prophecies* ?" John exclaimed.

"Oh, yes. We have an entire hall full of recordings of real prophecies," said Mr. Shin, "Or rather, predictions of the future. Prophecy is such a misunderstood term-"

"But divination is-"

"I do not speak of *divination*," said Mr. Shin impatiently. "I speak of *predictions that accurately describe future events and also take a vital, meaningful part in shaping them* ."

Harry was still confused. John and Mr. Lestrade looked no better.

"I don't understand," said John.

"Divination assumes there is a hidden esoteric relationship between future events and seemingly unrelated things such as star patterns, palm lines or tea leaves," Mr. Shin explained. "You may justly scorn

this notion. Even if there is a relationship, what meaning does it have in the grand scheme of things? Does it answer the questions of why you are here, where are you going, and what does life really mean? Emphatically: *No* !"

Harry stared in amazement as Mr. Shin, who started waving his teaspoon enthusiastically about, became more animated and passionate as he continued:

"True prophecies, on the other hand, appear without warning and seemingly unprompted even by the seer who utters them. Without fail they have a vital influence in shaping the history they predict. Can you not see what this means? That real prophecies exist implies a future narrative that has yet to unfold also exists. That prophecies do not merely observe future events, but take an active role in shaping it means it has a meaningful role in the narrative itself. Also, if there is a *story*, there has to be a *storyteller* . In short, there is an overarching story to our very existence, and the things that happen to us are not a collection of random events devoid of meaning. There is a *cosmic storyteller* who is overseeing the unfolding of history, and prophetic word is a vital way in which the cosmic storyteller shapes it. Understand the role of prophecy and nature, and you will understand the heart of the storyteller."

Harry smiled feebly. He was sure Mr. Shin was enthused for very good reasons, but he couldn't see it. Mr. Lestrade had a slightly lopsided grin on his face, like he was far too amused at Mr. Shin's uncharacteristic show of energy to think about much else. John, on the other hand, looked very excited.

"That was the most insightful thing I've heard in a long time, sir," said John eagerly and sincerely. "I never thought real prophecies are evidence for the cosmic storyteller."

Mr. Shin beamed.

"Could you go over your reasoning behind your definition of a real prophecy?" John asked. "You seem to put a lot thought behind it."

"Besides accuracy, which is the main test, there are several characteristics all real prophecies have," said Mr. Shin. "There is

always a date component that limits the margin of error to a very small window. It also involves individuals, either currently living or to be born in the future. But the most intriguing thing is that-"

There was sharp click at the door. Harry looked around and realized Sherlock was no longer in the room. John's excitement died a painful death when everyone noticed his vacated chair. Mr. Lestrade palmed his face.

"Sorry, he's a prat," said Mr. Lestrade wearily.

"Not everyone finds this good news or even interesting," said Mr. Shin, looking rather rueful. "Be kind to him. It was I who got too carried away."

Mr. Lestrade thanked Mr. Shin and they took their leave. They found Sherlock pacing the living room.

"Dammit, Sherlock, couldn't you at least thank my FIL before you take off? He's really sticking his neck out for you, you know," Mr. Lestrade growled.

Sherlock sneered. " *Please* . He knows he has a better chance at finding Black if he works with me."

"After what I heard in there, I don't think so. Seems like he can reason things out as well as you do," Mr. Lestrade snapped.

Sherlock whipped around, no doubt to say something cutting and cruel. Mr. Lestrade dug both feet to the floor and folded his arms. Both were clenching their jaws before the bloody-free-for-all when John stepped into the fray.

"Mr. Shin's a top-class researcher. Of course he can reason things well. You're an investigator of crime, this is your specialty, not his," said John tiredly to Sherlock before rounding on both men. "Now *cut it out*, both of you! Do you realize how stupid you look like right now?"

Mr. Lestrade and Sherlock backed away from each other slowly.

"So what you going to do?" asked John curtly.

Sherlock started pacing again. "There is nothing more we can do about Sirius Black until Shin gets back. Might as well look into the poisoning case; could be the work of a budding serial killer."

"Okay. You go and have fun."

Sherlock skittered to a halt.

"You aren't going?" Mr. Lestrade sputtered in dismay.

"I think I'll stay here and talk to Jack," said John, looking away.

Sherlock glowered. "Oh, you're angry at me, so you won't help."

"Of course I'm angry at you. You make me angry *all the time*," snarled John, glaring up at the ceiling. "I don't think I should face Robert right now. Might do something I'll regret."

A terrible silence was just starting to fester when the rice-papered sliding door connecting the living room to the rest of the house slid open and a familiar looking girl wearing a white hoodie with narrow red stripes popped her head in.

"Harry! And Dad, you're early!" said Julia Lestrade happily.

Mr. Lestrade looked immensely glad and relieved as Julia bounded in, ponytail bouncing, and hugged his chest tightly. Her presence immediately banished the heavy air that was threatening to smother the group. John was smiling again, and even Sherlock felt well enough to roll his eyes at the onslaught of Fluff.

"I'm still working. Sorry, sunshine," said Mr. Lestrade regretfully, "Had to ask Grandpa some questions."

Julia made a disappointed noise. "So you're going back to the office?"

"After a bit of detour. I-"

"Are you doing interviews? Can I go too? I won't be in the way," asked Julia, bright brown eyes sparkling.

"Aren't you still grounded?"

"Auntie Jack let me out *yesterday* . So please Dad?"

Mr. Lestrade hesitated. "It's routine and boring. I don't think-"

" *Please* ? I never get to see you work. Please, Daddy, please?"

Mr. Lestrade caved like wet paper, leaving Harry to contemplate the unfair advantage girls had over boys when it came to changing the atmosphere and wheedling things out of their fathers. Well, he supposed no one had an advantage in wheedling things out of Sherlock…

"Take her with you," said John, smiling indulgently. "Having a kid around would probably help when you interview the patients and staff. Call it take your child to work day."

"Good idea," said Lestrade, wrapping an arm around Julia and beaming. She beamed back. They looked disgustingly cute.

Harry glanced at Sherlock. Their eyes met. Immediately both Sherlock and Harry recoiled. *Eeew…*

"You're pathetic, Lestrade," Sherlock growled, shuddering.

"Shuddup. I'd like to see you do better when Beatrix is born."

"Beatrix?" Sherlock repeated, frowning in confusion.

"You don't remember Beatrix? I gave imaginary birth to her a few minutes ago," said John sardonically, "She has skin as white as snow and hair as black as night. Just like her Daddy. I'm pretty sure she'll grow up to have his eyes and cheekbones too."

Julia giggled into Mr. Lestrade, who roared with laughter. Sherlock did a full-body cringe.

"For f-'s sake, John. DELETED!"

"We really need to stop swearing in front of the kids," Lestrade said as he drove Sherlock, Julia and Harry to the hospital Dr. Ju worked as a guest surgeon (John didn't go as promised, claiming the imaginary labour was extremely tiring). Lestrade glared at the reflections on the rear-view mirror. "Kids, don't *ever* repeat the bad words we say."

Both Harry and Julia batted their large almond-shaped eyes innocently, which probably meant his and John's bad language was already part of their daily vocabulary. Lestrade despaired. Sherlock paid them no mind and continued to stare broodingly out the window. Not for the first time, Lestrade wondered what he was thinking.

The hospital was one of the nicer ones in Greater London. The nurse on duty tensed when Lestrade showed her his badge, but relaxed when he casually mentioned Julia and Harry were here as part of 'bring your child to work day', thinking, as expected, the visit can't be a very serious one if the Detective Inspector brought his kid(s) to work.

"We got an anonymous tip about a patient here who died recently," Lestrade said. "I just wanted to follow up."

The nurse, Helen Macharia, instantly lit up.

"You mean Mrs. Agnes. I *knew* something wasn't quite right about the way she died. Our guest surgeon has been pleading with Dr. Smith to do something about it for *weeks*, but he just wouldn't listen."

Lestrade noted how nurse Macharia relished in speaking her words.

"Our source mentioned someone stole Mrs. Agnes' skin samples. Is there anything you can tell me about this?" he probed.

Nurse Macharia didn't know about the theft, but rung up the lab tech working in the Pathology Department for him. The LT confirmed one of Mrs. Agnes skin samples had gone missing a few months back.

"Could you take us to Mrs. Agnes's private rooms?" said Sherlock.

"How did you know she had a private room?" asked Macharia.

"Her elabourate obituary, taking up more column space than strictly necessary to announce her death means she was a woman of means. You belong to the burn ward, the odour coming off of you tells me as much. Mrs. Agnes was a long term patient according your statement: ' *Our guest surgeon has been pleading Dr. Smith to do something about it for* weeks', and you could say that because you've seen the exchanges yourself. Therefore, Mrs. Agnes was in the burn ward, needing long-term care. Considering the threat of infection, it is impossible Mrs. Agnes only came to the hospital for checkups. So, she had her own room."

"Oh my," said Nurse Macharia breathlessly. "You sound like that 'Net detective, detective sergeant!"

A spasm ran across Sherlock's face. Lestrade thought fervently if Sherlock was really his DS, he'd've transferred him to the Shetlands within the first week.

Nurse Macharia took them to Mrs. Agnes' old private rooms. She warned them there may not be much for them to find, as it had been stripped and scrubbed down since she died. She opened the door, and Lestrade was immediately hit by a brick wall of sickeningly sweet fumes. He threw his arm to his face and backtracked.

"Mrs. Agnes did a bit aromatherapy on the side," Nurse Macharia said, staring at Lestrade, whose eyes were starting to water. "But that's strange. I can barely smell anything. Are you sensitive?"

Lestrade shook his head. He noticed Sherlock was frowning at him and appeared not to be affected by the smell, which didn't make sense because Sherlock had keener senses. Harry and Julia were leaning against the hallway, pinching their noses.

Eventually the smell stopped being a bloody nuisance, and Lestrade entered the room. It was a fairly typical private hospital room, if a bit on the smaller side. Harry and Julia joined him.

"I have to be back on call," said Macharia. "Will you be okay?"

Lestrade gave her a thumbs-up. Macharia left. Sherlock was already donning latex gloves and staring at a small glass vial shoved off in a corner.

Sherlock picked it up and studied it under the florescent light. The small amount of liquid sitting on the bottom of the vial was a transparent blue and moved like oil. Sherlock sniffed at it briefly.

"Belladonna," he muttered.

Julia and Harry crowed closer.

"Diluted Bubotuber pus," Harry added.

"Tugwood," said Julia, frowning. "These are ingredients of common skin-clearing potions."

Sherlock stood up straight, his expression stony, pale and mask-like.

"Wizard crime," he declared.

Lestrade wet his lips. "Dr. Ju must be a wizard too."

Sherlock bit the inside of his mouth and worried it. His frown turned stormier.

"I have to talk to Robert Ju."

"Oi, you can't just-"

Sherlock, of course, didn't listen and flew out of the room. Lestrade stifled his swearing and chased after him, beckoning the kids to follow.

Apparently Sherlock knew where to go because he strode through the halls without asking anyone for directions. As he followed the prat, Lestrade remembered John said Dr. Ju worked at Johns Hopkins; Sherlock probably looked up Johns Hopkins's hospital directory and found out which surgery unit Dr. Ju belonged to. *Neurosurgeon, then?* Lestrade thought as Sherlock barged into the Neurosurgery wing like he'd owned the place.

Several nurses and doctors started when Sherlock swept inside. As luck would have it, Dr. Ju was standing in the hallway, wearing scrubs, shoe covers and a hairnet, and talking to a nurse holding a clipboard. Dr. Ju glanced over his shoulder as Sherlock loomed at him.

"One moment, please," he said calmly. "I'll get back to you shortly."

Dr. Ju resumed talking to the nurse. Sherlock made the nurse nervous by breathing down Dr. Ju's neck and glaring. Ju didn't look back and continued to list out… medications and tests, from the sound of it, as if Sherlock didn't exist. There was a calm assurance in his voice and his relaxed posture was completely at odds with the slightly manic and off-kilter behaviour he exhibited at the station.

At length, Dr. Ju dismissed the nurse (who fled gratefully), cracked his neck, and squared his shoulders.

"My office?" he said, locking his tawny eyes to Sherlock's pale ones.

Lestrade had a mental image of two Titans measuring each other for battle as Sherlock and Ju engaged in a brief staring contest.

At length, both Ju and Sherlock moved, Ju in the lead by necessity. Lestrade, Julia and Harry followed after them. Lestrade felt like a tag-along, but that was nothing new. As far as Sherlock was concerned, he was just the guy who had the badge.

Dr. Ju's office door didn't have a nameplate. The office itself was dustless and barren, with only a generic office desk, desktop computer and monitor, and three mediocre swivel-chairs occupying the small space. Besides the cheap biros sitting next to the computer mouse, there were no small items; no photos, no paintings, no framed certificates, no plants. There wasn't even a funny bobble head to relieve the starkness.

Ju seated himself behind the desk and gave them his full attention.

"You're a wizard," Sherlock began.

"You've discovered the skin-clearing potion," Ju returned. "But you are not like me."

Sherlock waved carelessly at Harry. "My son is a wizard."

"I thought so." Ju waved at the kids. "Hi, I'm Robert, nice to meet you."

Harry and Julia waved back awkwardly.

"So have you alerted the Magical Law Enforcement?" Ju asked to Lestrade. "When are the Aurors coming?"

Lestrade looked at him, confused. " *What* ?"

"Aren't you the Muggle Liaison for the Scotland Yard?" asked Ju, frowning.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Lestrade. "What are Aurors?"

Ju raked his sharp eyes all over Lestrade. Whatever he observed made him groan. " *Ooooh.* "

" *What* ?" Lestrade demanded.

"A few questions first, please, and don't you dare lie to me," said Ju, leaning forward. "Inspector, did you have grey hair since you were a child?"

"Yes."

Sherlock and the kids stared at Lestrade in astonishment. Ju turned grim.

"Did you receive a full blood-transfusion as a child?"

"Yeah," said Lestrade, feeling apprehensive. "My Grandmother told me I had some kind of accident."

Ju let out an aggrieved sigh. "Always that excuse. Why can't they be more creative?"

"What do you *mean* ?" Lestrade demanded again, thoroughly confused and frustrated now.

"I don't even know where to start." Ju fixed a piercing look at Lestrade. "Do you know there is a hidden world of Magic? That there are witches and wizards who have their own culture, government and history?"

"Yes."

"At least you know *something* ." Ju sighed. "Detective Inspector Lestrade, you're a wizard."

There was silence for a span of a minute. Only the humming of the desktop could be heard.

"You're lying," gasped Lestrade. "This is a bad joke."

"I'm always completely serious," said Ju, expressionless and sitting ramrod straight in his uncomfortable office chair, "I cornered you specifically at the station because you were leaking magic everywhere. I thought you were doing it on purpose."

"How the bloody-heck could I be leaking magic?" Lestrade cried. "Look, I know how magic works for magical kids before they go to Hogwarts. Strange stuff happens whenever they're sad or upset. I've been sad and upset plenty of times when I was a kid, but nothing weird happened around me. I never got a Hogwarts letter. You're *wrong* ."

Ju didn't even blink. "Have you been donating blood regularly for the last five years?"

"Yeah," said Lestrade, startled.

"Since the Surrey Zoo bombing, I presume," said Sherlock. "There was a blood supply shortage due to the large number of victims. You contributed, and have been regularly harassed for more blood donations since then."

"It was a good cause. But what does that have to do with anything?"

"Everything," said Ju. "Inspector Lestrade, you were robbed of your magic when you received a blood transfusion as a child. For a wizard, being transfused with Muggle blood is the equivalent of

pouring water into a car's gas tank-or the petrol tank, to you Brits. The water in the tank doesn't stop the car from being a car, but it does stop it from being able to act like a car. In the same way, the Muggle blood you received didn't stop you from being a wizard, but it did stop you from being able to act like one. You were only able to properly refuel yourself of magic when you donated your blood."

Lestrade opened and closed his mouth. He just couldn't take it. Him, a *wizard* ? Crazy talk, that's what it was. But Harry and Julia, they were sharing knowing looks as though they'd suspected this. Sherlock, too, looked smugly vindicated. Good Lord. Had his magic been wreaking havoc and he didn't even *notice* ? No, that can't be right. He didn't have magic to wreak havoc to begin with. It was all just wrong.

"How does this work?" asked Sherlock. "The human body produces 2.4 million new erythrocytes per second. Even if Lestrade received Muggle blood as a child, his body would've long since recycled it."

"The phenomenon isn't fully understood," said Ju. "There's just not enough data. Wizards and witches use Blood-replenishing potions for blood-loss. Magic children are hardier thanks to their magic, so it's extremely rare for them to get hurt enough to achieve the necessary blood-loss. But the handful of cases where a witch or wizard lost their ability to perform magic for no *apparent* reason, all received a blood transfusion from a Muggle source."

Sherlock regarded Ju thoughtfully. "You developed the treatment."

"I formalized it. Witches and Wizards have always used blood-letting for Magic Enhancement Therapy. It's useless, dumb and downright dangerous as far as Magic Enhancement is concerned, but it does work for magic removal cases."

Another brooding silence fell in the office. Lestrade suddenly recalled Jackie's refusal to go through Magic Enhancement Therapy this morning. If the therapy involved blood-letting, it was small wonder she said she'd rather die. Poor Jack had enough health problems already. She didn't need hypotension on top of the others.

"No wonder Jackie was dead-set against Magic Enhancement

Therapy," Lestrade muttered.

"Smart woman," said Ju in approval. "The practice is concentrated doodoo. It doesn't even have the decency to work like a placebo. But that's beside the point. Detective, there is a simple test that can prove you really are a wizard."

Ju pulled out a small square sheet of paper that had thick, black lines running parallel to all the edges inside from his desk drawer.

"I know what that is!" Harry exclaimed. "The black lines glow when a person who has even a tiny bit of magic touches it!"

"What he said," said Ju. "Go ahead. Touch it."

Ju placed the square on his desk.

Lestrade stared at the little square for a long time. Harry and Julia watched him, full of eager anticipation. Sherlock was practically vibrating in his seat. Lestrade felt ambivalent. He didn't want the black line to glow, to be honest. Knowing how his life usually went, either outcome would end badly for him. Besides, he was on the wrong side of forty. Even if he was a wizard, he was too old to do anything about his magic. What was the point, then?

"You don't have to do anything about it," Ju said, when Lestrade didn't move for several minutes. "It's just part of you. Wizard or not, you'd still be a hardworking, respectable Detective Inspector who has a lovely daughter." He nodded at Julia. "You raised her well. Even *I* can see you love her dearly and she adores you right back. No amount of magic in world would've helped you do that."

Lestrade felt slightly less reluctant. He vaguely wondered who this Robert Ju was and where the Robert Ju who faffed around in his office seemingly without the ability to act like a normal human being a few hours back was.

"C'mon, Dad, it's just a test," Julia urged after another minute.

Lestrade slowly raised a hand. He hesitated again and let the hand just hover over the paper.

"We haven't got all day, Lestrade," said Sherlock impatiently.

Lestrade glared at him briefly. He hesitated some more. Soon, the audience anticipation just became too much.

"Oh, what the hell," he growled, and slapped his palm on the square.

The black lines lit up like fire.

Lestrade groaned as the kids burst into applause.

I live over forty years as a Muggle only to learn I'm a Wizard. FML, he thought.

Robert Ju sprang to his feet. Lestrade was wondering what kind of pronouncement he was going to make, when Ju started stripping off his clothes without another word. Ju discarded his shirt, shoe covers and hairnet. Lestrade let out an undignified squawk when Ju pulled off his cotton scrub trousers as if he, Sherlock and the kids were just sacks of invisible potatoes. Lestrade hurriedly covered Julia's eyes as Ju marched over to a chair in the corner wearing only his pants and black socks. He put on the clothes folded there: black suit, white shirt, and hideous brown tie that had a pink palm tree on it. He put his feet into the polished black shoes under the chair, shrugged on a jacket and turned to his shocked audience as if they'd just turned back to humans again.

"Excuse me; I have to go."

Then he left, taking a biro and paper bag on the way.

Sherlock, Lestrade, Julia and Harry stared at each other incredulously.

" *What is wrong with him* ?" Lestrade wondered out loud, because someone had to.

The question lingered in Lestrade's mind as they left the hospital until he stopped by Jackie's to drop off Julia. There they found Jack and John in the living room, John laughing at Jack, who was pouring over a large chalkboard on the sitting table, talking animatedly as she drew illustrations with coloured chalk. Jack paused only to open

her mouth to let the bits of food John tearing into tiny pieces inside. Mr. Shin was standing in a far corner, staring and shaking his head in disbelief, as he watched Jack *chew and swallow the food* .

"Alright, scratch that," Lestrade muttered. "Sherlock, *what is your wife* ."

Final Notes : Robert is so ridiculous I don't even know. Lestrade now knows he's a wizard. What he'll do about this remains to be seen.

Opinions were evenly divided among the readers, so I decided on a weekly update schedule with chapters around the 6000-8000 word mark where applicable.

Error in Expectations

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Two: Error in Expectations

Arthur Weasley regarded his in-tray. He was expecting a minor avalanche after a month away from the office, but this was ridiculous. On top of a tottering, two feet tall pile of parchment was a toy car emitting jets of fire from its tiny exhaust, a pair of reading glasses that blinked sleepily and a plastic figurine of a bristly bearded ancient warrior holding a battle-axe that belched. Arthur was scratching his temple, pondering what he should tackle first and if it was possible to take another month-long holiday, a pale violet paper aeroplane flew into his office.

Arthur groaned as he unfolded the first inter-departmental memo of the day.

" 'Need to talk. The Embalmer struck again. Kingsley,'" he read aloud.

Arthur considered his in-tray again. He decided the Embalmer, a notorious and elusive killer known to poison his victims, preserve their bodies and entomb them in underground enclaves in ghastly poses, was greater priority than belching Muggle figurines.

Arthur left his tiny office, marching through a dimly lit and shabby

corridor, turned left, then another corridor (less shabby), turned right, into another passage, and walked through a set of oak doors and turned to another set of oak doors. He passed by a cubicle that had a lopsided sign that read AUROR HEADQUARTERS and a couple of scarlet robed witches before he arrived at Kingsley Shacklebolt's cube.

"Morning, Arthur," said Kingsley in his deep voice. "Shin June Hu caught me on my way in and told me his son-in-law picked up a case that looks suspiciously like the work of the Embalmer. A Muggle woman is dead and her body is showing no signs of decay even though it's been close to a week since she was buried."

Arthur winced. "How did the son-in-law come across it?"

"He works for the Muggle law enforcement in London- the Scotland Garden."

"You mean the Scotland *Yard*," said Arthur, shaking his head. "What do you need me for? The Embalmer isn't enchanting Muggle artefacts, surely?"

"Shin specifically recommended you as the wizard contact," Kingsley replied. "The son-in-law also found evidence of potion use in the Muggle hospital the Muggle woman died in. His daughter is a witch, so he's familiar with potions and their ingredients. It's possible the Embalmer enchanted a Muggle healing artefact to administer whatever poison he used to kill his last victim."

"Alright," Arthur sighed. "So what are you planning to do?"

"I'm going to meet the son-in-law at the Leaky Cauldron. The Muggles are investigating the death, too. He's the lead investigator at the moment; wants to close the case as cleanly and quietly as possible."

Arthur brightened at the prospect of working directly with a Muggle. "Sounds like a plan."

Arthur and Kingsley prepared for the meeting. In case they had to navigate Muggle London, they changed into Muggle clothing. Arthur

donned his trusty jeans, golf shirt and bomber jacket, whereas Kingsley opted for a black suit and tie. Kingsley picked up a thick file from his desk and together they headed to the nearest fireplace to Floo to the Leaky Cauldron.

They waited at the bar upon arrival. As they did so, Arthur told Kingsley everything he knew about Greg Lestrade, Grandmaster Shin's one and only Muggle son-in-law. Arthur had met the man briefly last year at Diagon Alley whilst doing the annual school shopping, but he had had no chance to talk to him. He vaguely remembered the silver-haired man, as grave, solemn and extremely good-looking as the rest of the Grandmaster's family.

"Hopefully he's not as intimidating as Shin," Kingsley joked. "Though, knowing that family, he's going to be straightforward and professional."

Arthur was about to agree when the bell attached to the Leaky Cauldron's door leading to Muggle London tingled. A middle-aged, tired and rumpled-looking man wearing a long coat, dark blue suit and sturdy shoes walked in. Tom, the barkeep, hailed him over.

"You're early, today, Greg!" said Tom, smiling.

Greg smiled back. "Nah. Still at work. Maybe later." Then with a more sombre expression, he headed over to Arthur. "Arthur Weasley? Hello, I'm Detective Inspector Lestrade."

They shook hands. Arthur introduced Lestrade to Kingsley. He didn't have to explain their Ministry positions as Lestrade had a good working idea of what they did.

"Sherlock told me about yours and *another* wizard told me what an Auror is. You guys keep popping up out of the woodwork," said Lestrade, grumbling in a good-natured way, "So business?"

They sat down. Lestrade set down the manila folder tucked under his arm.

"Strictly speaking I'm not supposed to show this to you," he said. "But you guys don't exist as far as non-Magicals are concerned, and

this is really your case."

Kingsley grinned. "Strictly speaking we're not supposed to tell you anything either, magic children notwithstanding, but the Ministry doesn't need to know that. I'm sure our Head won't complain if you help us catch the Embalmer."

"Brrr, sounds like a moniker for a serial killer," said Lestrade, giving them a boyish grin. "So what can you tell me about this Embalmer?"

Kingsley gave Lestrade a brief history of the Embalmer. An elusive figure, everything about him was unknown except for the fact that he was most likely a wizard. He had five confirmed victims so far: Ann Nichols, Mary Chapman, Lizzie Stride, Kitty Eddowes and Jane Kelly. All of them had been killed by the same unnamed poison. Lestrade winced at the wizard photos of the victims, which were taken shortly after their bodies were discovered.

"Definitely looks like the work of a serial killer," he growled. "Thanks for the info. Now this is what I've got."

He opened the manila folder.

"So far we've ID-ed three victims," said Lestrade, showing them three Muggle photographs. "Adelaide Agnes, age 36, Janice Smith, age 29, and Victoria Savage, age 32. All of them were blonde-haired servicewoman being treated for scaring or burns. We think the killer is specifically targeting women in their late twenties or early thirties who have heavy scaring. Not sure if the blonde hair is a requirement or if war service is just a coincidence, but it's possible. The killer did shift-work at the hospital where he found his three victims. After he did his thing, he removed the memory of all the hospital members and left."

"How do you know this?" asked Kingsley wonderingly.

"There is conspicuous *absence* of memory for very specific days of the week for all hospital staff," Lestrade explained. "You can expect a few people to not remember much about their past days, but the lack of memory was very systemic and too overarching. *No one* could remember much of anything for a specific shift schedule. Very

suspicious, don't you think?"

"That's clever," Kingsley remarked. "You're good."

"I wish I could say this was my idea, but no, I had help."

"It was Sherlock, wasn't it?" said Arthur knowingly. "Is he helping you with the case?"

"Are you talking about Sherlock Holmes?" asked Kingsley. "Isn't he the Muggle who adopted *Harry Potter* ?"

"That would be him."

"Are you sure we want his help? There's an unofficial flee-on-sight command for him and his partner; too many Obliviators who ended up obliviating themselves instead."

Lestrade snorted. "Of course you wizards know the Baker Street Bastards. Anyway, no; Sherlock signed himself off the case."

"Why? I thought this was right up his street," said Arthur.

"Normally, yes, especially when there's a serial killer on the bottom of it, but not this time," said Lestrade grimly. "Remember the preferred victim description?"

"Women around their thirties or late twenties, blonde-hair, involved in war and has profound scarring," Kingsley replied.

"Doesn't that sound familiar?"

Arthur frowned. Clearly he was supposed to find the description familiar, but he couldn't figure it out.

"Fits John to a Tee," Lestrade clarified when either wizard failed to answer. "Most serial killers like to follow the press coverage of their crimes. If Sherlock gets involved, the killer might notice John and select her as the next victim."

"Wait, aren't you talking about Mr. Holmes' *male* partner?" asked Kingsley, looking confused.

" *Male* -" Lestrade caught himself. "No, John Watson is his *wife* ."

There was a brief moment of silence as Kinsley struggled to wrap his mind around this. Arthur sympathized - with both Kingsley and Sherlock.

"I remember now," said Arthur. "My son Ron wrote a letter to me once, about John's scaring when he was a first year. He, Hermione and Harry were researching potions that could reduce them. How bad is it exactly, do you know?"

Lestrade grunted. "I saw it once by accident. Looked like someone tore off the left arm, put it through an acid bath and then sewed it back on."

Both Kingsley and Arthur cringed.

"Even if John is looked over as a target, the killer is way too liberal with the memory removal spells," Lestrade went on. "Sherlock freaked out majorly when he figured that out. I think that's the main reason why he washed his hands off the case."

"He doesn't want to risk John's mind," said Arthur, recalling the time a memory charm hit Sherlock at Flourish and Blott's last year. The last time he heard, Sherlock still had not recovered his lost memory, but managed to work *around* the absent memory to figure out what had happened (the man's genius was truly something). Either way, Sherlock had firsthand experience on what it was like to have one's memory removed. Clearly he did not wish this upon John.

"He'll sooner turn the whole island over and throw it into the Irish Sea than put John in unrecoverable danger," said Lestrade. "You wizards have too much advantage as it is. You guys only need to have one successful hit, but we can't afford to make one mistake and that's not counting our memories going caput. Not fair."

Arthur ruefully agreed. "I understand. I do wish he could at least help us figure out the clues."

"Oh, he'll be more than happy to do *that* . Just don't expect him to show up in the crime scenes. Or to appreciate your blood, sweat

and tears. Or to think you're doing something right. *Twat*," Lestrade grumbled.

Arthur smiled. Clearly Mr. Lestrade had a lot of experience working with Sherlock Holmes.

They exchanged some more information on the Embalmer. Lestrade offered the theory the Embalmer had a pathological fixation on the idea of fixing his physical appearance, the skin in particular. Kingsley asked if he could view the bodies of the three victims. Lestrade said he could as long as he could make himself look like an official person from the Home Office.

"Will this do?" asked Kingsley, holding up a small card.

Lestrade frowned at it. "That's a blank business card."

"It's bewitched to look like whatever ID a Muggle is expecting to see."

"It's a blank card," Lestrade insisted.

"Trust me, it works," said Kingsley calmly. "I use it for my guard shift at Downing Street."

Lestrade looked dubious, but let it slide. Before they could go, Lestrade told Arthur he needed to change his clothes.

"Why?"

"You're not dressed like a person from the home office," said Lestrade flatly. "Kingsley, you're good. Arthur, magic an outfit that looks like *his* ."

In the end, Arthur had to put a disillusionment charm on himself because Muggle business suits were not things one can conjure from thin air. Lestrade had asked why, and Arthur explained natural fabric fell under Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration and its five exceptions. Lestrade remained confused, but was content to remain so as he led them to his car parked outside where it was raining buckets. Kingsley took the seat next to Lestrade, and Arthur took the back seat.

"By the way, are you actually-" Kingsley started to ask after drying them off with a quick flick of his wand.

"NOPE. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT," shouted Lestrade.

Arthur stared at him in astonishment. Kingsley blinked. Lestrade kept his glance squarely on the windscreen, which the rain was battering.

"I'm just saying-" Kingsley tried again.

"NOPE! I'M IN PERMENANT DENIAL! IF I DON'T ACKNOWLEDGE IT, IT'S LIKE IT'S NOT TRUE," Lestrade bellowed.

Kingsley remained silent for rest of the ride. Arthur, meanwhile, surreptitiously pulled out his mobile fone and started to text someone…

John finished replying to Arthur's last text and resumed quietly staring at Sherlock. They've been at it since this morning when Mrs. Hudson, who was more than a little worried about the state of their marriage due the ferocity of their recent rows, told them not to leave the flat until they talked it out. Since both of them thought normal and healthy communication was for pansies and the persistent thunderstorm raging outside put a stop to any thought of long walks, they sat down at the sitting room table, made their demands and refused to budge until the other caved.

That is, until John's phone chirped after Arthur sent his text full of much needed information.

"So you're not taking the case because I could be a potential victim and the killer is worse than Lockhart when it comes to Memory Charms."

Sherlock looked away briefly. John sighed through her nose.

"I wouldn't have-you could've told me that."

A lightning flash briefly illuminated Sherlock's porcelain mask-like expression and glance. John didn't bother to decipher either. If one wanted to know the true state of Sherlock Holmes, one had to study his *hands* . Sherlock spoke loudly with his hands-whether it was for emphasis, for embellishment, or for no particular reason-and even when he shut himself off from the world, his hands still spoke.

John reached across the table and held his wrist. Sherlock curled his fingers around John's. There was a fine tremor running through the long, sensitive fingers, and the pulse was elevated. After studying their loosely joined hands, John looked up.

"So you want to know all my ex's?"

Sherlock's eyes burned. "Who are they?"

"Number one was a star pupil at King's. Triple firsts in Medicine, Physics and Mathematics. He proposed, but I refused to drop my army ambitions. We parted afterwards. I never saw him again. No idea what he's doing."

"Number two?"

"A hotel chain owner from HK; I broke it off when he said sleeping with me would be like sleeping with a preteen. He kept trying to start things over again for *years* . Not lately though."

"I know."

"Do you have anything to do with it?"

"Perhaps."

"Mycroft it is," John exhaled. "Number three was a short, meaningless fling. Number four was an utter debacle. All you need to know was that I was trying to figure out if I was lesbian daughter number two. Number Five was an American journalist from NYC. A lot older, lots of fun, but I broke it off because I wanted something deeper and more meaningful."

"Number six was *Robert*," Sherlock spat.

John felt the heightened tremor. "I met him after my tour in Iraq. You know what happened to me in Iraq."

Sherlock's fingers tightened their hold. "You were emotionally compromised."

"And Robert has this *switch*," said John. "He turns it on for his patients. It makes him temporarily angelic."

"Explain."

"Blimey, how do I do this… okay, he's kind of like you in the way he dedicated his entire life to his work. In his case it's being a doctor. I've met plenty of brilliant doctors, and Robert is definitely world class in both skills and knowledge, but what set him apart were his *bedside* manners. Hard to believe when you saw him outside the context of doctor first, but it's true. You know patients always lie about their symptoms, right?"

Sherlock nodded curtly.

"Here is the rub," John continued, " *Different patients lie differently* . Obvious, yeah? But most people rarely stop to think about it more deeply. This is what he told me: patients who want as many people to like them as possible lie in a way they think will make their doctor like them. Patients who want to be loved will lie in a way that will make them feel more loved. Patients who want respect lie in a way they think will preserve whatever respect they do have and gain their doctor's respect. Etcetera and so forth. Robert can figure what a patient wants from other people within the first two sentences, and curtail his bedside manner accordingly. There was hardly any patient he couldn't manage. Of course, anyone who knew what he was doing called him a calculating, manipulative b-tard, but no one could argue his results - not even his worst enemy."

Sherlock looked intrigued.

"If he told you this, you must have noticed his systemic approach."

"I'm a doctor, of course I noticed. I asked as soon as I could find the opportunity. He was pretty open about sharing his system. It was a

revelation to me. The past twenty-nine years of my life finally made sense."

"Why?"

"You can apply the system to *everyone*, not just patients. I applied it to me, and I quickly realised everything I did was motivated by my desire to be *liked* ."

Sherlock snorted rudely.

"So how did the friendly knowledge transfer relationship transform into engagement?"

John smiled ruefully.

"Emotionally compromised, remember? Even after knowing why I did the things I did, old habits die hard. I was convinced I finally found someone who can really understand me and tried to build a new relationship on that basis. I don't think Robert was prepared for someone to use his system on *him.* "

"You figured out his heart's desire."

"It was almost too easy. I knew since I was a teen most guys are susceptible to *respect* and girls are susceptible to *love* . Show them you genuinely respect them or love them and they'll do everything in their power to keep your regard. I basically did the same thing, only I gave Robert what he wanted: showed him I *liked* him exactly as he is and not just his Doctor persona, which he only set up to make himself more likable."

"How did the engagement break off, then, if you were so successful?"

" *Robert hates lies*," said John flatly. "He said the only way we could work is for either one of us to become someone we are not."

" *He* broke it off."

"Mmmhmm. We were both really broken about it. For me, my fiancé rejected me shortly after Iraq. For Robert-well, I don't think he ever

felt *liked* until I came along and showed him I liked him really blatantly. He had to give that up."

Sherlock studied John thoughtfully.

"In the light of this startling revelation," he said sardonically, "I wonder if I've been interacting with the genuine you, or a persona you've subconsciously created to make me *like* you."

"Oh, c'mon," John snorted. "When was I ever able to successfully lie to you? Anyway, after the first two minutes of hearing you speak, the 'punch me in the face' subtext killed any thought of *making* you like me. Your subsequent behaviour kept it well and truly dead. Christ alone knows why we both thought getting married was a good idea under such circumstances, but since we ended up there despite knowing the absolute worst about each other within the first twenty-seven hours, I guess it was meant to be."

Lestrade stopped at a building called St. Bartholomew's Hospital. The rain had reduced to a drizzle when he took them to the morgue inside. There they met a young woman who had long, mousy hair wearing a white coat and blue rubber gloves. She was hovering next to a young man literally elbow deep inside a dead woman's body. Arthur felt his gorge hoist anchor at the sight.

"Hey Molly," said Lestrade to the young woman. Arthur perked up instinctively at the mention of his wife's name.

"Hi," said (not-wife) Molly, smiling nervously. "You're here for, um, Ms. Savage? Dr. Ju is looking at her right now. You'll have to wait for a bit."

"Dr. Ju?" said Kingsley, craning to get a better look at the young man who was squelching through organs, making Arthur's gorge go from free-floating sensation to a quick drop-anchor. "Not Robert Dongyi Ju?"

"You know him?"

"He's known as the modern day Hua Tou."

Healer Robert Ju raised a stained, rubber-gloved finger towards the ceiling at that comment.

"Do you hear that?" he said out of the blue.

Arthur, Molly, Lestrade and Kingsley frowned. All they could hear was the light humming coming from the ecelectic lights on the ceiling.

"Hear what?" asked Lestrade.

"That whirring sound," said Ju, not looking up from where his nose was almost touching the open chest.

Lestrade frowned more deeply. "Sorry, I don't-"

"It's the sound of Hua Tou spinning in his grave," muttered Ju, bringing his raised hand back into the open chest cavity. "There's a direct correlation between the degree of insult and revolutions per second. From the sound alone I can tell the last insult was too profound for words. So please stop."

There was nothing one could possibly say to that so no one did. Arthur heard of Robert Ju's reputation for eccentricity, but he was completely unprepared for *this* .

"… Right," sighed Lestrade. "So what have you got?"

"Powdered moonstone, half-digested Armadillo skin, and Hellebore," said Ju, lifting up an organ and almost bringing Arthur to his knees. "Not something that directly caused her death, but it clearly indicates the killer made Ms. Savage digest a very specific combination of compounds."

Lestrade nodded as he wrote that down in his notebook. "That's definitely something we can work with."

"For further evidence, I suggest you recheck the stomach contents of all the victims. Never hurts to be too careful."

"I can put in the request," said Molly brightly.

"Thank you," Ju looked up a fraction. "So you're the Molly Hooper Rory was talking about."

Molly blinked. "How did you…?"

"I remember every fellow medical professional I've ever met. I met Rory four years ago in Germany. I called him up the moment I arrived in London."

" *Oh* ."

Molly looked down and started fidgeting her hands. Ju straighten himself facing the opposite direction.

"Rory is a fine nurse. I can trust him with my life and that of my patients." Ju paused. "Don't let his uncanny resemblance to a certain person stop you. The resemblance is pretty much the only thing they have in common. Rory is not a tyrant, for starters."

Molly looked up at Ju timidly. "Did you just call John a ty-"

"A *benevolent* tyrant, but a tyrant nevertheless," said Ju relentlessly.

Molly darted her glance back down to her feet, wide-eyed and blinking.

"I believe the Home Office people would like to take a look at the body," said Ju.

Molly started. "Uh, but there's only-"

Ju removed a glove and held the door open rather pointedly.

Molly eventually shuffled out, muttering, " *Okay* ."

Ju shut the door behind her. He removed his other rubber glove, disposed both into a bin, and walked over to Kingsley.

"The poison was administered in a vapour form via inhalation," Ju said quietly. "The beautification potion ingredients were distraction only. I'd check the vents or the oxygen machines."

Lestrade swore.

"How do you know this?" asked Kingsley sharply.

"Ms. Savage's nasal mucosa shows signs of recent rupture - in laymen terms, she had a nose bleed. If the poison affected her lungs, a good Anatomical Pathology Technologist would've seen it. But the lungs are fine and the poison left its mark in the sphenopalatine artery. There are so many white blood cells there you can practically smell it. There are poisons that specifically target the blood. Nose-bleeds, vapourized blood-targeting potion, you have your murder method."

" *Damn,* " Lestrade whistled.

"We need to check the hospital," said Kingsley rapidly to Lestrade. "See if the vents had been tampered with."

"I can do better than that. I have the bottle Mrs. Agnes used for *aromatherapy* . She'd inhaled the stuff for *weeks* ."

"Excellent. Arthur, can you work with Culverton?" asked Kingsley, referring to the Hit-wizard assigned to do to the undercover work for the Muggle victims of the Embalmer. He was very talented, but so uneasy on the eyes enchanted mirrors had a tendency to scream when he came too close. "We can't rule out tampered vents or bewitched oxygen machines yet."

"Will do," said Arthur, before turning to Ju. "By the way, how did you know I was…?"

But Ju was not where he last stood; he was gone.

Not only that, Ms. Savage's open chest cavity was sealed shut and her body covered under a sterile white sheet.

Ron scanned the crowd from his vantage point at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour's outdoor seating with Hermione, when Hermione wasn't teasing him over his freckles (doubled in number thanks to the Egyptian sun) and Ron teased right back for

her deep tan (France was sunny). They eventually spotted a skinny, black-haired, bespectacled boy wearing a dark jacket, charcoal skinny trousers and grey trainers, who was shouldering a white messenger bag that had blue edges and lettering. The girl next to him had her thick dark-brown hair up in a ponytail and was dressed in a plain white hooded jacket, black jersey, and knee-length black shorts that had white vertical stripes on the seams, carrying a bulging white tote bag. Ron yelled at them:

"HARRY! JULIA!"

Harry Potter and Julia Lestrade caught sight of them immediately and hurried over, beaming and waving, Harry looking incredibly pale and Julia as incorrigibly white as usual.

" *Finally* !" said Ron, grinning at the two as they sat down. "We went to the Leaky Cauldron, but they said you'd went to Diagon Alley. So we went to Flourish and Blotts, and Madam Malkin's, and-"

"We got all our school stuff last week," Harry explained. "Looks like you two got sun. All we got was rain, rain and more rain. Did I mention we had rain?"

"And gale when the rain got tiring," Julia added.

"Harry, why are you carrying that bag?" said Hermione in a very serious voice.

Ron looked at Harry's bag and roared with laughter when he realised it read: 'this bag contains a gun, a bomb, a very large knife and loads of drugs' in blue block letters. He laughed some more when he noticed Julia was trying to hide the front of her tote, which simply said: *bloody hell* .

"I got it for my birthday," said Harry defensively. "So, have you got all your new books and stuff?"

"Yep," Ron pointed at the large bag under his chair, "What about those *Monster Books*, eh? The assistant nearly cried when we said we wanted two."

"What's all that, Hermione?" Julia asked, pointing at not one but

three bulging bags in the chair next to her.

"Well, I'm taking more new subjects than Ron, aren't I," said Hermione. "Those are my books for Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, the Study of Ancient Runes, Muggle Studies-"

"What are *you* doing Muggle Studies for?" said Ron, rolling his eyes. "You're Muggle-born! Your mum and dad are Muggles! You already know all about Muggles!"

"It'll be fascinating to study them from the wizarding point of view and they've changed the curriculum this year to prepare you for the GSCEs," said Hermione earnestly. "Mum and Dad were so relieved when I told them about it. Besides, Harry's taking it too and he's Muggle-raised!"

"I didn't sign up for everything except Divination like you. Speaking of, are you planning to eat or sleep at all this year?" asked Harry, while Ron sniggered. Hermione ignored them.

"I've still got ten Galleons," she said, checking her purse. "It's my birthday in September, and Mum and Dad gave me some money to get myself an early birthday present."

"How about a nice *book* ?" Ron said innocently.

"No, I don't think so," said Hermione composedly. "I really want an owl. I mean, Harry's got Hedwig, Julia has Sasha-"

"Sasha's Uncle Jeremy's owl," Julia piped.

"-and you've got Errol," Hermione finished.

"No, I haven't," said Ron. "Errol's a family owl. All I've got is Scabbers." He pulled his pet rat out of his pocket. "And I want to get him checked over," he added, placing Scabbers on the table in front of them. "I don't think Egypt agreed with him."

Scabbers was looking thinner than usual, and there was a definite droop to his whiskers.

"There's a magical creature shop just over there," said Harry, who

knew Diagon Alley like the back of his hand. "You could see if they've got anything for Scabbers, and Hermione can get her owl."

So they paid for their ice cream and crossed the street to the Magical Menagerie.

Twenty minutes later, Ron and Harry found themselves outside Quality Quidditch Supplies pulling out Scabbers from under the wastepaper bin he'd taken refuge under. Ron stuffed the trembling rat back into his pocket and straightened up, massaging his head.

"What was that?"

"It was either a very big cat or quite a small tiger," said Harry, referring to the huge orange thing that came soaring from the top of the highest cage in the Magical Menagerie, landed on Ron's head, and then propelled itself, spitting madly, at Scabbers. The rat made a daring escape by shooting from between the counter witch's hands like a bar of soap, landing splay-legged on the floor, and then scampering out of the door.

"Where's Hermione?"

"Probably getting her owl…"

They made their way back up the crowded street to the Magical Menagerie. As they reached it, Julia and Hermione came out, but Hermione wasn't carrying an owl. Her arms were clamped tightly around the enormous ginger cat.

"You *bought* that monster?" said Ron, his mouth hanging open.

"He's *gorgeous*, isn't he?" said Hermione, glowing.

Both Harry and Julia glanced to the side. For good reasons: The cat's ginger fur was thick and fluffy, but it was definitely a bit bowlegged and its face looked grumpy and oddly squashed, as though it had run headlong into a brick wall. Now that Scabbers was out of sight, however, the cat was purring contentedly in Hermione's arms.

"Hermione, that thing nearly scalped me!" said Ron.

"He didn't mean to, did you, Crookshanks?" said Hermione.

"And what about Scabbers?" said Ron, pointing at the lump in his chest pocket. "He needs rest and relaxation! How's he going to get it with that thing around?"

"That reminds me, you forgot your rat tonic," said Hermione, slapping the small red bottle into his hand. "And *stop worrying* . Crookshanks will be sleeping in my dormitory and Scabbers in yours, so what's the problem? Poor Crookshanks, that witch said he'd been in there for ages; no one wanted him."

"Wonder why," said Ron sarcastically as they set off towards the Leaky Cauldron, where Hermione, Ron and the rest of his family were staying overnight.

"Isn't it strange, though?" said Harry, walking with his hands clasped behind his back like the old man wannabe that he was. "Scabbers has to be four-years-old at least, *six* if Percy had him since he was a first year. If an ordinary garden rat can't live longer than three years or so, how did he stay alive for so long?"

"Maybe his special power is longevity," Julia suggested.

Ron rolled his eyes. The truth was that Scabbers had never shown the faintest trace of *interesting* powers. It would figure his perennially second-hand belongings would last longer than strictly convenient. How Scabbers survived the incident that left him with a tattered left ear and a missing toe on his left paw was anyone's good guess, but he came like that when Percy gave him to Ron two years ago. Scabbers was definitely hardier than he looked.

"Well, we'll know when he's still alive by the time you leave Hogwarts," said Hermione reasonably. "How come you still haven't got an animal, Julia? Didn't your uncles offer to buy you a cat?"

"I want a *dog*," said Julia firmly, "A *big* dog. Like an Alsatian or a Great Dane."

"Aren't Great Danes *bigger* than you?" said Harry, lips twitching.

"That's why I want one. I'm going to name it 'Horse' and ride on its

back."

They reached the Leaky Cauldron and found Ron's Dad sitting in the bar, reading the *Daily Prophet* .

"Harry!" he said, smiling as he looked up. "How are you?"

"Fine, thanks," said Harry as he, Hermione and Ron joined Arthur with their shopping.

Arthur put down his paper, and Ron saw the picture of Sirius Black staring up at him.

"They still haven't caught him, then?" Harry asked.

"No," said Arthur, looking extremely grave, "It's been three weeks and still no sight of him. The entire Ministry is focused on catching him now."

"Would we get a reward if we caught him?" asked Ron. "It'd be good to get some more money-"

"Don't be ridiculous, Ron," said Arthur, who on closer inspection looked very strained. "Black's not going to be caught by a thirteen-year-old wizard. It's the Azkaban guards who'll get him back. You mark my words."

The rest of Ron's family joined them after that moment. Ginny, who had a crush on Harry ever since she'd seen him, turned bright red when she spotted Harry and muttered "Hello," without daring to look at him. Percy immediately made an utter arse of himself by holding out his hand solemnly to Harry as though he and Harry had never met and said, "Harry, how nice to see you."

"Hello, Percy," said Harry, miraculously straight-faced.

"I hope you're well?" said Percy pompously, shaking hands.

"Very well, thanks-"

"Harry!" said Fred, elbowing Percy out of the way and bowing deeply. "Simply splendid to see you, old boy-"

"Marvellous," said George, pushing Fred aside and seizing Harry's hand in turn, "Absolutely spiffing."

Percy scowled.

"That's enough, now," said Molly.

"Mum!" said Fred, as though he'd only just spotted her and seizing her hand, too. "How really corking to see you-"

"I said, that's enough," said Molly, depositing her shopping in an empty chair. "Hello, Harry and Julia, dears. I suppose you've heard our exciting news?" She pointed to the brand-new silver badge on Percy's chest. "Second Head Boy in the family!" she said, swelling with pride.

"And last," Fred muttered under his breath.

"I don't doubt that," said Molly, frowning suddenly. "I notice they haven't made you two prefects."

"What do we want to be prefects for?" said George, looking revolted at the very idea. "It'd take all the fun out of life."

Ginny giggled.

"You want to set a better example for your sister!" snapped his Mum.

"Ginny's got other brothers to set her an example, Mother," said Percy loftily. "I'm going up to change for dinner…"

He disappeared and George heaved a sigh.

"We tried to shut him in a pyramid," he said. "But Mum spotted us."

Greg Lestrade and his two young sons, Martin and Rupert, as well as his baby daughter Elise joined Julia, Arthur and the rest of his family (and honorary family) at the Leaky Cauldron that night for dinner. Lestrade looked harassed and exhausted: his chin was grey

with stubble, his silver hair was standing on end, and he was stumbling over his own two feet carrying an enormous nappy bag. He practically collapsed from relief when Arthur levitated the bag off his shoulder and Molly happily took baby Elise.

"I need a break," he mumbled behind his hands. "Superintendent Chambers - and G-d help me, one of these days I'm going to call him Super Nintendo Chalmers if Bradstreet keeps quoting the Simpsons - looks like he's about to have a hernia if we don't catch the Embalmer soon. Any progress on your end?"

"No, sorry," said Arthur, looking deeply apologetic. "Black has greater priority. All the other dark wizard cases are on hold until we find him."

Lestrade groaned unhappily. "My next press conference is going to be *hell* ."

"I thought they transferred the case to someone else since you have a conflict of interest."

"The higher-ups always make me sit in press conferences, *especially* when a high-profile case is going nowhere," Lestrade crabbed. "I don't understand why. I suck at press conferences."

Arthur was of the opinion Lestrade's superiors were hoping to distract the public from the bad news with his face. "I'm sure we'll find something soon," he said brightly.

Lestrade's returning growl was heavy laced with doubt.

They had a delicious five course meal that ended with sumptuous chocolate pudding. Arthur admired the way Julia handled her little brothers, who were a lot younger than her. Martin Lestrade, age five, turned his nose up at the onion soup until Julia told him he was allowed to skip it as long as he agreed to forgo his dessert-which she would eat in front of him. Rupert Lestrade, age three, had not yet mastered the use of eating utensils, but stubbornly refused any help. Thus half of his food ended up on his face and bib rather than inside his mouth. Rather than forcing help, Julia just handed over a clean handkerchief and Rupert, with an almost alarming degree of

maturity, used it clean himself up. Greg Lestrade smiled proudly at his older children as he fed Elise, who, at age one and a half, already had strong opinions about food and did not hesitate to throw it back when it displeased her.

The others chatted amongst themselves as Arthur studied the Lestrades and reminisced about the days when his children were still babies. Hermione asked Arthur about Ms. Jacqueline Shin's case, and he assured her the first thing he did after returning from Egypt was clearing the charges against Ms. Shin for supposedly enchanting a laptop compooter. It was obvious from the fact the laptop still worked as intended that no magic was ever performed on the machine. Molly inquired over Mrs. Lestrade, and Lestrade simply replied: "It's Tuesday." Harry explained John and Mrs. Lestrade were part of a church women's group that met every Tuesday. Several Weasleys and Hermione laughed aloud when Harry casually mentioned the ladies of the small group once successfully apprehended a murderous Chinese acrobat Sherlock was investigating.

" *How* ?" everyone except Lestrade and Harry wanted to know.

"Dunno," said Lestrade as Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not surprised, though. Those ladies are *fearsome* ."

Everyone except Percy and Molly almost died laughing as Lestrade gleefully told them the time the intrepid ladies kidnapped John from a crime scene for an impromptu makeover, and Sherlock was unable to do anything to stop them.

"My wife is so awesome," said Lestrade fondly after he finished.

"By the by, where is Sherlock and John?" asked Arthur.

"They're off doing something in the continent," said Lestrade, "I'm not sure if I want to know what for."

His voice was firm and steadily, but Arthur couldn't help noticing that Lestrade didn't meet anyone's eye, like the last time Kingsley tried to ask him about his magic status.

"So you're on your *own* ? Who are you staying with, Harry?" asked Molly in alarm.

"I'm staying with Mrs. Hudson," Harry replied calmly. "She lives downstairs. I always stay with her when Sherlock and John can't take me with them."

Molly was immediately relieved. "Oh, that's good to know. Now don't you worry about taking the cab or the Muggle underground tomorrow, dear, we'll pick you up on the way to King's Cross. You'll fit into our car just fine."

Harry rubbed the back of his neck. "Thank you."

After dinner, everyone felt full and sleepy. Lestrade coaxed a fussy Elise into her baby car seat as he called his in-laws. Rupert and Martin clutched Julia's hands on her either side. Harry tried to convince Arthur he could take the Tube, but both Arthur and Molly objected strongly. It was dark outside, and young boys had no business walking around on their own (especially when there were deranged dark wizards roaming free, but Arthur didn't say that).

Harry had resigned to taking a ride back to Baker Street in Arthur's Ford Anglia when a sleek black car parked right in front of the Leaky Cauldron. Lestrade started swearing under his breath when he saw it.

"Go back inside," he growled.

"Why?" Arthur asked as Molly peered at the car curiously.

The rear door behind the driver seat opened, and a tall Muggle man dressed in a dapper three piece suit stepped out, a black umbrella hanging on his left elbow. He clicked his leather shoe heals together and stood imposingly in front of them.

"Harry," he said, rolling his vowels and smiling in a way that strongly reminded Arthur of Lucius Malfoy.

Poor Harry looked like he wanted the ground to open and swallow him up. "Hello, Mycroft," he muttered sullenly.

"Did you have a good time with your friends?" Mycroft inquired.

Harry didn't answer. Mycroft appeared not to be fazed by the silence and turned his attention to Arthur and Molly. Arthur suddenly felt like a peasant farmer facing a Lord.

"Good evening," he greeted. "Thank you looking after my nephew. I believe you've already met my little brother?"

It took an embarrassing amount of time for Arthur to make the connection.

"You're Sherlock's *older brother* ?" he blurted stupidly.

"Yes," said Mycroft, smiling like a snake eyeing a juicy rat it wished to devour. "Whom do I have a pleasure of addressing?"

"Uh…" Arthur hesitated. In the corner of his eye, he noticed Lestrade was shaking his head minutely in dire warning. "Arthur. You can call me Arthur."

"Pleasure," said Mycroft.

Arthur shivered. Though Mycroft Holmes had done nothing and said nothing wrong or untoward, something about his sharp, penetrating gaze made Arthur's scanty hair stand on end. It felt as though all of his secrets were being siphoned off from his person as Mycroft raked his grey eyes once over him.

"As much as I would like to stay and chat, I'm afraid I must take Harry back home," said Mycroft at length. "Good eve to you. I hope we'll see each other very soon. Harry, come."

Harry miserably climbed into the black car. It drove away as soon as Mycroft got back inside and closed the door behind him. Arthur stared at the road it disappeared into for a very long time.

"Who is that?" he whispered.

"One of the most dangerous men you're ever going to meet," Lestrade muttered darkly. "G-d, I'm so sorry. I didn't want this to happen to you."

Arthur shivered again.

Ron woke up next morning to Tom the innkeeper's toothless smile and a cup of tea. He left his room soon afterwards because Percy started accusing him of dripping tea on his photo of Penelope Clearwater-Percy's *girlfriend* (what kind of girl was she, agreeing to date *Percy* of all people?).

"The sooner we get on the train the better," he said irritably at Hermione over breakfast. "At least I can get away from Percy at Hogwarts."

He didn't get to talk to her much afterwards in the chaos of leaving; they were too busy heaving all their trunks down the Leaky Cauldron's narrow staircase and piling them up near the door, with Hermes, Percy's screech owl, perched on top in his cage. In the middle of the fray, Hermione deposited a wickerwork basket beside the heap of trunks. It spitted loudly.

"It's all right, Crookshanks," Hermione cooed through the wickerwork. "I'll let you out on the train."

"You won't," snapped Ron, "What about poor Scabbers, eh?"

He pointed at his chest, where Scabbers was curled up in his pocket.

The journey to King's Cross was uneventful. His Dad had somehow got hold of two Ministry cars, each of which was driven by a furtive-looking wizard wearing a suit of emerald velvet. They stopped by at 221B to pick up Harry. Harry was waiting for them outside his flat, chatting with a smartly dressed old Muggle lady. Harry hugged her and the old lady kissed him on the cheek before he joined Ron and Hermione in their car.

"That's Mrs. Hudson," Harry explained with a mischievous look. "She's not my housekeeper."

They reached King's Cross with twenty minutes to spare; the Ministry drivers found them trolleys, unloaded their trunks, touched

their hats in salute to Arthur, and drove away, jumping to the head of an unmoving line at the traffic lights.

Arthur kept close to Harry's elbow all the way into the station.

"Right then," Arthur said, glancing around them. "Let's do this in pairs, as there are so many of us. I'll go through first with Harry."

Arthur strolled toward the barrier between platforms nine and ten, pushing Harry's trolley and apparently very interested in the InterCity 125 that had just arrived at platform nine. With a meaningful look at Harry, he leaned casually against the barrier. Harry imitated him. They both vanished on the next blink. Ron and Hermione joined them after Percy and Ginny went through the barrier, taking it at a run.

"Ah, *there's* Penelope!" Percy was saying when Ron and Hermione entered platform 9 and ¾, smoothing his hair as he went pink. Ron caught Hermione's eye, and they both turned away to hide their laughter as Percy strode over to a girl with long, curly hair, walking with his chest thrown out so that she couldn't miss his shiny badge.

Once everyone made it to platform 9 and ¾, they walked to the end of the scarlet steam train, past packed compartments, to a carriage that looked quite empty. They loaded the trunks onto the carriage, stowed Hedwig and Crookshanks on top of the heap, then went back outside to say goodbye to Ron's mum and dad.

His mum kissed all her children, then Hermione, and finally Harry. Harry looked embarrassed, but quite pleased, when she gave him an extra hug.

"Do take care, won't you Harry?" she said as she straightened up, her eyes oddly bright. Then she opened her enormous handbag and said, "I've made you all sandwiches. Here you are, Ron… no, they're not corned beef… Fred? Where's Fred? Here you are dear…"

"Harry," said Arthur quietly, "Come over here for a moment."

He jerked his head towards a pillar. Harry followed him behind it, leaving the others crowded around his mum.

His dad looked very tense and grave as he spoke to Harry at length. Harry listened quietly, and only frowned at the end when his dad said something more intensely still. Harry said something in reply as the train whistled loudly.

"Arthur, quickly!" cried his mum.

His dad said one last thing, which only served to make Harry look more confused.

Steam was billowing from the train as it started to move. Harry ran to the compartment door and Ron threw it open and stood back to let him on. They leaned out of the window and waved at Arthur and Molly until the train turned a corner and blocked them from view.

"I need to talk to you," Harry muttered to Ron and Hermione as the train picked up speed.

"Go away, Ginny," said Ron.

"Oh, that's nice," said Ginny huffily, and she stalked off.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off down the corridor dragging their trunks, looking for an empty compartment, but all were full except for the one at the very end of the train. This had only one occupant, a man sitting fast asleep next to the window. Harry, Ron, and Hermione checked on the threshold. The Hogwarts Express was usually reserved for students and they had never seen an adult there before, except for the witch who pushed the food cart.

The stranger was wearing an extremely shabby set of wizard's robes that had been darned in several places. He looked ill and exhausted. Though quite young, his light brown hair was flecked with grey.

"Who d'you reckon he is?" Ron hissed as they sat down and slid the door shut, taking the seats farthest away from the window.

"Professor R. J. Lupin." whispered Hermione at once.

"How'd you know that?"

"It's on his case," she replied, pointing at the luggage rack over the man's head, where there was a small, battered case held together with a large quantity of neatly knotted string. The name R. J. Lupin was stamped across one corner in peeling letters.

"Wonder what he teaches?" said Ron, frowning at Professor Lupin's pallid profile.

"That's obvious," whispered Hermione. "There's only one vacancy, isn't there? Defence Against the Dark Arts."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione had already had two Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers, both of whom had lasted only one year. There were rumours that the job was jinxed.

"Well, I hope he's up to it," said Ron doubtfully. "He looks like one good hex would finish him off, doesn't he? Anyway…" he turned to Harry, "what were you going to tell us?"

"It's about Sirius Black," said Harry quietly. "The ministry thinks he's after me."

Harry told them how Minister Fudge went out to Azkaban on the night Black escaped. The guards told Fudge that Black had been talking in his sleep for a while now. It was always the same words: " *He's at Hogwarts… he's at Hogwarts.* " In Ron's dad's opinion, Black was deranged and thought murdering Harry would bring You-Know-Who back to power. Black lost everything the night Harry stopped You-Know-Who, and he had twelve years alone in Azkaban to brood on it. Anyway, the Ministry had asked Albus Dumbledore if he would mind the Azkaban guards stationing themselves around the entrances to the school grounds. Dumbledore wasn't happy about it, but he agreed. All the security around Harry today had been in place because they feared Black may have a go at him if he was alone. The last thing Arthur warned Harry before he got on the train, was to never, *ever* go looking for Black.

When Harry finished speaking, Ron was thunderstruck and Hermione had her hands over her mouth.

Then Hermione finally lowered them to say, "Sirius Black escaped to

come after *you* ? Oh, Harry… you'll have to be really, really careful. Don't go looking for trouble…"

"I don't go looking for trouble," said Harry, looking nettled. "Trouble usually finds *me* ."

"How thick would Harry have to be, to go looking for a nutter who wants to kill him?" said Ron shakily.

"That's what I said," said Harry irritably. "The way your dad put it, it was almost like he *expected* me to go after him if I had good enough reason."

Harry looked far too calm for someone who had *another* madman after his life. Ron supposed he became callous from overexposure. After all, most people didn't have two madmen who tried (and is still trying) to kill you since you were baby.

"No one knows how he got out of Azkaban," Ron said uncomfortably. "No one's ever done it before. And he was a top-security prisoner too."

"But they'll catch him, won't they?" said Hermione earnestly. "I mean, they've got all the Muggles looking out for him too…"

"What's that noise?" said Ron suddenly.

A faint, tinny sort of whistle was coming from somewhere. They looked all around the compartment.

"It's coming from your trunk, Harry," said Ron, standing up and reaching into the luggage rack. A moment later he had pulled the Pocket Sneakoscope he bought for Harry's birthday out from between some robes. It was spinning very fast in the palm of Ron's hand and glowing brilliantly.

"Is that a *Sneakoscope* ?" said Hermione interestedly, standing up for a better look.

"Yeah… mind you, it's a very cheap one," Ron said. "It went haywire just as I was tying it to Errol's leg to send it to Harry."

"Were you doing anything untrustworthy at the time?" said Hermione shrewdly.

" *No* ! Well… I wasn't supposed to be using Errol. You know he's not really up to long journeys… but how else was I supposed to get Harry's present to him?"

"Stick it back in the trunk," Harry advised as the Sneakoscope whistled piercingly, "or it'll wake him up."

He nodded toward Professor Lupin. Ron stuffed the Sneakoscope into a particularly horrible pair of mustard yellow socks, which deadened the sound, then closed the lid of the trunk on it.

"We could get it checked in Hogsmeade," said Ron, sitting back down. "They sell that sort of thing in Dervish and Banges, magical instruments and stuff. Fred and George told me."

"Do you know much about Hogsmeade?" asked Hermione keenly. "I've read it's the only entirely non-Muggle settlement in Britain."

They talked about Hogsmeade, which third years and above were allowed to go to on special occasions. Hermione, of course, nattered about the stuff she'd read off of books, like the inn was the headquarters for the 1612 goblin rebellion, and the Shrieking Shack's was supposed to be the most severely haunted building in Britain. Ron didn't pay attention to the lecture and ruminated over Honeydukes and their many famous sweats. Harry, as usual, just soaked in all the talking without saying much himself.

The train ride went on peacefully. Professor Lupin slept on, despite Hermione's one timid attempt to wake him up during lunch. He might not be very good company, but Professor Lupin's presence in their compartment had its uses. Mid-afternoon, just as it had started to rain, blurring the rolling hills outside the window, they heard footsteps outside in the corridor again, and their three least favourite people appeared at the door: Draco Malfoy, flanked by his cronies, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle.

"Well, look who it is," said Malfoy in his usual lazy drawl, pulling open the compartment door. "Potty and the Weasel."

Crabbe and Goyle chuckled trollishly.

"I heard your father finally got his hands on some gold this summer, Weasley," said Malfoy. "Did your mother die of shock?"

Ron saw red. He stood up so quickly he knocked Crookshanks's basket to the floor. Professor Lupin gave a snort.

"Who's that?" said Malfoy, taking an automatic step backward as he spotted Lupin.

"New teacher," said Harry, who got to his feet, too. "What were you saying, Malfoy?"

Malfoy's pale eyes narrowed; he wasn't fool enough to pick a fight right under a teacher's nose.

"C'mon," he muttered resentfully to Crabbe and Goyle, and they disappeared.

Harry and Ron sat down again, Ron massaging his knuckles.

"I'm not going to take any crap from Malfoy this year," he said angrily. "I mean it. If he makes one more crack about my family, I'm going to get hold of his head and-"

Ron shook his fist violently in midair.

"Ron," hissed Hermione, pointing at Professor Lupin, " *be careful*…"

But Professor Lupin was still fast asleep.

The rain thickened as the train sped yet farther north; the windows were now a solid, shimmering grey, which gradually darkened until lanterns flickered into life all along the corridors and over the luggage racks. The train rattled, the rain hammered, the wind roared, but still, Professor Lupin slept.

At long last, the train started to slow down.

"Great," said Ron, getting up and walking carefully past Professor Lupin to try and see outside the completely black window. "I'm

starving. I want to get to the feast…"

"We can't be there yet," said Hermione, checking her watch.

"So why're we stopping?"

The train was getting slower and slower. As the noise of the pistons fell away, the wind and rain sounded louder than ever against the windows. They got up to look into the corridor. All along the carriage, heads were sticking curiously out of their compartments.

The train came to a stop with a jolt, and distant thuds and bangs told them that luggage had fallen out of the racks. Then, without warning, all the lamps went out and they were plunged into total darkness.

"What's going on?" said Ron, backing away.

"Ouch!" gasped Hermione. "Ron, that was my foot!"

"D'you think we've broken down?" asked Harry's voice in front of Ron.

"Dunno…"

More confusion followed. Neville blundered into their compartment a few minutes later, followed by Ginny, who was looking for Ron.

"I'm going to go and ask the driver what's going on," came Hermione's voice. Ron felt her pass him, heard the door slide open again, and then a thud and two loud squeals of pain.

"Who's that?"

"Julia?"

"Hermione?"

"What are you doing?"

"Looking for you-"

"Come in, sit down, it's a bit crowded here-"

"Not here!" said Neville hurriedly. " *I'm* here!"

"Quiet!" said a hoarse voice suddenly.

Professor Lupin appeared to have woken up at last. Ron could hear movements in his corner.

None of them spoke. There was a soft, crackling noise, and a shivering light filled the compartment. Professor Lupin appeared to be holding a handful of flames. They illuminated his tired, gray face, but his eyes looked alert and wary.

"Stay where you are," he said in the same hoarse voice, and he got slowly to his feet with his handful of fire held out in front of him.

But the door slid slowly open before Lupin could reach it.

Standing in the doorway, illuminated by the shivering flames in Lupin's hand, was a cloaked figure that towered to the ceiling. Its face was completely hidden beneath its hood. Ron's eyes darted downward, and what he saw made his stomach contract. There was a hand protruding from the cloak and it was glistening, greyish, slimy-looking, and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water…

But it was visible only for a split second. As though the creature beneath the cloak sensed his gaze, the hand was suddenly withdrawn into the folds of its black cloak. And then the thing beneath the hood, whatever it was, drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it were trying to suck something more than air from its surroundings.

An intense cold swept over them all. Ron felt his own breath catch in his chest. The cold went deeper than his skin. It was inside his chest, it was inside his very heart… It was the weirdest feeling, like something vital had been sucked out of him, leaving him gaping and empty. As a dim fog clouded the edge of his vision, he saw Ginny start shaking like mad and Hermione curling into herself.

Then, to his horror, he saw Harry go rigid, slump off from his seat and start twitching on the floor. The small sliver of his open eyes

showed nothing but whites, like his eyes had rolled to the back of his head.

Before anyone could do anything, Lupin stepped over Harry and pointed his wand at the creature.

"None of us is hiding Sirius Black under our cloaks. Go," he said.

But the hooded creature didn't move. It just stood at compartment door, drawing another rattling breath.

Lupin muttered something. A silvery thing shot out of his wand and went after the creature. Only then did the creature turn around and glide away.

Sometime later the lights went back on. The train also started to slowly shake itself back into motion. Feeling better with the lights on, Ron knelt down next to Harry and shook him awake.

Except he wouldn't wake up. He just kept laying there as rigid as a board. Ron slapped his face a few times, but Harry remained unconscious. His skin felt very cold and clammy to touch.

"Do you think he had a seizure?" Julia asked, kneeling next to Ron. She looked very pale and worried.

A loud snap made them all jump. Professor Lupin was breaking an enormous slab of chocolate into pieces.

"Eat this," he said. "It'll help. When Harry wakes up, give him this."

Professor Lupin handed a very large piece of chocolate to Ron. Ron took it and a smaller piece nervously.

"What was that thing?" Julia asked Lupin in a voice barely higher than a whisper.

"A Dementor," said Lupin, who was giving pieces of chocolate to everyone else. "One of the Dementors of Azkaban."

Everyone stared at him. Professor Lupin crumpled up the empty chocolate wrapper and put it in his pocket.

"Eat," he repeated. "It'll help. I need to speak to the driver, excuse me…"

He disappeared into the corridor.

They sat in a very heavy silence for a long minute.

"It was horrible," said Neville suddenly, in a higher voice than usual. "Did you feel how cold it got when it came in?"

"I felt weird," said Ron, shifting his shoulders uncomfortably. "Like I'd never be cheerful again…"

Ginny, who was huddled in her corner, gave a small sob. Hermione went over and put a comforting arm around her. Julia, who was almost the same colour as Muggle foolscap, clutched at Harry's sleeve looking incredibly anxious.

Professor Lupin came back a few minutes later. He paused as he entered, and turned very grim and upset when he noticed Harry still hadn't woken up.

"I need to take him to Hogwarts immediately."

Lupin picked up Harry like he weighed nothing and swiftly left again.

They didn't see him for the rest of the day.

Final Notes : The chapter started out very depressing and angsty, but, fortunately for all parties, it didn't work out and had be scraped. Phew. I really can't do prolonged angst.

If I ever find the time and brains, I would like to write a John/Molly post-TRF fic. The idea of Sherlock having to deal with an engaged/ married John and Molly is… hard to resist. Despite the minimal grounds on which the relationship would build. And the AWKWARD that would surely follow when Sherlock comes back. Oh, yeah…

Filling In

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Three: Filling In

"How was your first week, Remus?"

It was the first Saturday of the fall term, and Remus Lupin's first weekend as a Hogwarts Professor. He smiled as he settled into an armchair inside the staffroom.

"It went rather well, all things considered," he said, "Just a bit unnerving to see the children of my old classmates."

His colleagues, many of them his old teachers, chuckled knowingly.

"Don't I know that," squeaked Flitwick. "It's uncanny really, how closely children can resemble their parents."

The teachers started sharing amusing examples of thereof. Remus noted everyone studiously avoided mentioning the most notable case: *Harry Potter* . He thought he knew why. Of all the children, the one Remus both anticipated and dreaded teaching the most was James Potter's one and only child.

Their 'reunion' couldn't have been more awkward, Remus though ruefully. The Dementors of Azkaban had boarded Hogwarts

Express, and Harry was most severely affected by the foul creatures. Remus had to Apparate directly to Hogsmeade to take him to Hogwarts as quickly as possible. Hagrid was beside himself with worry when Remus handed the still unconscious boy over for him to carry. Madam Pomfrey was very grim, but only half surprised to see Harry when they brought him to the Hospital Wing.

"Setting Dementors around a school," Pomfrey clucked disapprovingly. "He won't be the last one who collapses. Yes, he's all clammy. Terrible things, they are, and the effect they have on people who are already delicate…"

Hagrid and Madam Pomfrey exchanged a dark look.

Remus stood an indecorous amount of time at Harry's bedside, studying his pale and pinched features that so looked like a sickly version of childhood friend. Then he forcefully reminded himself he was a stranger to Harry and took his leave. Hagrid stayed behind.

Harry didn't return for the welcoming feast that evening. Hagrid confided to Remus that Harry had a panic attack when he woke up and was sent back to London to his adoptive family's home immediately after taking a Calming Draft. That was when he learned Harry no longer lived with Lily's sister. Petunia and her family had been dead for several years, and Harry had been utterly alone until he was adopted by a childless Muggle couple who incidentally saved Harry from the horrific explosion that claimed the lives of the rest of his family.

Quite a few students were deeply concerned when Harry failed to show up the next day. McGonagall reported the evening of the first day of classes all of the Gryffindor boys in the same year as Harry, plus Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley, also in Gryffindor, Terry Boot from Ravenclaw, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Ernie Macmillan, Hannah Abbott, Susan Bones and Julia Lestrade from Hufflepuff had inquired about his whereabouts and wellbeing. Many second years were similarly worried. A seventh year Gryffindor, Oliver Wood, was positively frantic. This sentiment of worry, however, was not universal. A Slytherin boy, Draco Malfoy, had taken to doing spirited imitations of someone fainting in terror and making loud, derisive comments about Potter running to his mummy because of

the scary Dementors.

Harry returned the day after and was present for his first Defence Against the Dark Arts class. All of his classmates were crowding close to him, Ron, Hermione and Neville in particular. Harry's expression was hard to decipher. It looked as though he'd shut the doors to his heart to guard himself against the outside world, something he'd never expected of James and Lily's child.

He covered Boggarts that day. He knew before the class could properly start Severus Snape had singled out poor Neville Longbottom for his bullying. Neville showed far more maturity than he expected when Snape made snide insinuations that Remus shouldn't entrust him with anything difficult unless he had Hermione Granger whispering instructions to his ear. The boy went red, but took the insult stoically.

"I was hoping that Neville would assist me with the first stage of the operation," Remus said in reply, "and I am sure he will perform it admirably."

And he did. Severus wasn't even his greatest fear; it was, oddly enough, a hideously large green snake. It got tied into a bow when Neville cast the Riddikulus charm.

The class went very swimmingly until the Boggart transformed into a six foot tall, hairy spider for Ron Weasley. The spider's legs vanished and the legless body rolled over to Harry's direction when Ron cast the Riddikulus charm. Remus quickly stepped forward.

"Here!" he shouted. The legless spider vanished and turned into a miniature full moon with a loud crack. " *Riddikulus* !" he said easily, and the full moon turned into a cockroach, "Forward, Neville, and finish him off!"

Neville charged forward looking determined.

"Riddikulus!" he shouted, and they had a split second's view of a fangless snake wearing a lacy bonnet before Neville let out a great " *Ha* !" of laughter, and the Boggart exploded, burst into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone.

"Excellent!" cried Remus as the class broke into applause. "Excellent, Neville. Well done, everyone… Let me see… five points to Gryffindor for every person to tackle the Boggart- ten for Neville because he did it twice- and five each to Hermione and Harry."

"But I didn't do anything," said Harry.

"You and Hermione answered my questions correctly at the start of the class, Harry," Remus said lightly, "Very well, everyone, an excellent lesson. For homework, kindly read the chapter on Boggarts and summarize it for me. To be handed in on Monday. That will be all."

Harry cast one last, searching look at Remus before joining his chattering classmates. It was slightly unnerving to see such a foreign expression on one looked so much like James.

"So who's dying this year?" asked Vector, snapping Remus out of his reminiscence. Apparently his fellow teachers had moved from talking to the manifestations of hereditary to Sybil Trelawney's habit of predicting the death of one student a year. How, he had no clue.

"One of mine," said McGonagall sardonically. "Neville Longbottom, if I could make a guess."

"No one applauded when you transformed into a cat?" said Vector knowingly.

"That was one clue," said McGonagall, smiling a little. "The second clue was finding Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter assuring Mr. Longbottom that Professor Trelawney, I quote, is an honestly deluded drama queen."

Everyone started talking about their respective first week of classes after a long bout of laughter. Vector gloomily reported the usual crop of students who quit Arithmancy after the first day. Charity Burbage reported the students, the Muggle-borns in particular, responded positively to the change in the Muggle Studies curriculum, which now included practical demonstrations of Muggle life and snippets of subjects Muggle students were expected to learn, and thanked Ms. Jacqueline Shin, the music teacher (a new addition to the Hogwarts

education Remus was pleasantly surprised at), for proposing and help implementing the change. Jacqueline turned pale pink and hid her face behind her ceramic teacup.

"Mine was glorious!" Kettleburn boomed, waving his clamp about. "I should've asked Hagrid to be my assistant ages ago! The *Monster Book of Monsters* turned out to be a great teaching point! Those kids now know better than to just *subjugate* those majestic creatures they so glibly call monsters! And with Hagrid around, I could start the new batch of third years with Hippogriffs without much of a trouble-we only had one cut arm!"

Jacqueline looked sideways over the brim of her ceramic teacup. McGonagall muttered exasperatedly, " *Only* ?" while Sprout and Flitwick shook their heads.

"Lucius Malfoy was very displeased to learn his son was injured in his first Care of Magical Creatures class," drawled Snape from his corner.

Kettleburn sneered at him. "The boy got what he asked for. Calling a Hippogriff an ugly brute to his face, what else was he expecting? If he doesn't want to get injured in class, he should *listen* to his teachers."

"Indeed. Please do tell that to his father when he marches up to Hogwarts to lodge protest against gross negligence. Speaking of which," Snape looked condescendingly at Jacqueline. " *When* will the promised new feature rollout, Miss Shin? The in-class mobile usage is getting out of hand."

"This evening, just like I told you," Jacqueline said patiently.

"Couldn't you have done this before the start of term?"

"That would've been ideal, but the Ministry of Magic only returned my network hardware a week ago," Jacqueline replied. "Shutting down Floo connections for only class hours takes a lot of time and planning."

Snape curled his lip. "Surely it doesn't take more than a day to do

something as straightforward as disconnecting a crude version of the Floo-Network from nine to three. Unless," his sneer grew, "you're having trouble understanding second year level spellwork?"

Oh, really, Remus thought, aggravated at Snape's constant taunting of Jacqueline's lack of formal magic education.

Jacqueline lowered her teacup. Her hands were steady and her expression was perfectly bland, but there was a dark glint sharpening in her eyes, which was intent upon Snape.

"Thank you for your understanding, Professor Snape. Your empathy is such that I'm starting to suspect you have the ability to actually read the heart of man."

Snape dropped his sneer. There was a moment of silence in the staffroom as he glowered at Jacqueline, who looked calmly back for several beats. Then she set her teacup to the side and rose to her feet.

"Excuse me. I have a long day of arduous network maintenance to perform."

"Really, Severus!" McGonagall exclaimed after Jacqueline left the staffroom. "Ms. Shin is working as hard as she can! There is no need to provoke her!"

"I remember seeing her enjoying a leisurely cup of tea here," drawled Snape. "I thought she needed a reminder…"

"For heaven's sake, I *invited* her here! She was looking close to fainting from overwork, so I more or less forced her to take a break-"

Remus left the staffroom, muttering his excuses. He headed to the Music Chamber. As he expected, Remus found Jacqueline there, hunched over a tiny desk with her back to the door. Her face was in her hands and her bony shoulders were shaking.

"You don't have to worry about me," said Jacqueline when Remus shut the door behind him. "That wasn't the worst I've ever heard."

After wiping her eyes with her palm, Jacqueline turned around. She

looked calm, but her eyes were red-rimmed and full of fatigue. No wonder, as Ms. Shin had been teaching Remus how to create clones per Dumbledore's request (so students wouldn't grow suspicious of Remus' monthly absences) on top of her duties as music instructor, assisting Burbage's Muggle Studies classes, working on the Magical Mobile Network and her engineering job in the Muggle world. Quite literally, she was doing the work of four people; Dumbledore's wry comment that he should triple her salary was not just a joke.

"I wish I could help you," said Remus earnestly. "My charm work is pretty decent and I have experience creating enchanted objects. Perhaps, once I understand the concept of mobile phones, I could lend a hand."

"Thank you, but the network isn't built on charms. It's not like I *could've*, seeing as I have trouble casting the most basic of spells," Jacqueline said, wilting under the weight of her self-deprecation. "I never expected it to become so popular. It's just a glorified walkie-talkie, for goodness sake."

Remus didn't know what a walkie-talkie was, but refrained from asking. "Still, if there is anything I can do…"

Jacqueline regarded Remus thoughtfully.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," she said, "But were you friends with Harry Potter's birth parents?"

Remus felt himself paling. "How did you-"

"From the sheer amount of loathing Professor Snape is projecting towards you, I can tell you were friends with his childhood enemies, Harry's father in particular," said Jacqueline. "I always wanted Harry to talk to someone who knew James Potter as a *friend* . I'm afraid the first person to mention their personal opinion of his birth father to Harry was Professor Snape."

Remus commanded himself to calm. "How did this happen?"

"Harry and his adoptive mother joined the group tour to Diagon Alley

when he was a first year. When the time for purchasing school equipment and books came, the students and their parents went separately with a teacher as their guide. Harry's mother picked Professor Snape because he looked about the same age as Harry's birth parents."

So it was an innocent mistake. "Do you happen to know what he said about James?"

"Arrogant, mediocre, determined rule-breaker and bully."

Remus sighed. If he was honest with himself, three out of the four were rather accurate. "It will be awkward."

"I know. But should you ever find the opportunity, I would really appreciate it if you talked to him. Don't worry too much about being awkward. Harry's adoptive father is a bit of an eccentric. I wouldn't be surprised if Harry is more used to dramatic, out-of-the-blue pronouncements than careful by-the-ways."

"I'll keep that mind," said Remus, smiling.

Jacqueline smiled back.

"Thank you very much. Now could you please excuse me? I really need to get back to work."

Remus left music chamber thinking various (unlikely) ways he could start a conversation with Harry.

It was only until a lot later did he realize Jacqueline hadn't asked Remus to do anything that would help *her* .

Two months swiftly passed since the first weekend of the term. The new feature of disconnecting all student phones from the Magical Mobile Network (MMN) during their class hours were put in place as promised. Many students howled in protest, but since the alternative was banning all magical mobile phones from Hogwarts, their mutters didn't last very long. Jacqueline's workload, however, remained ridiculously high. The MMN required regular maintenance and

expansion due to the rapidly growing customer base, and Remus was having trouble mastering the cloning spell, producing a very exhausted greyscale illusion of his own self at the best of times, so he had to keep going back to Jacqueline to ask what he was doing wrong. Remus himself was very busy, teaching and procuring materials for his classes, and grading when he wasn't practicing the cloning spell or plotting ways to talk to Harry.

Harry led a very busy life, Remus quickly noticed. He had violin lessons with Jacqueline every afternoon except Sundays. Once Quidditch season started, he was spending an hour at Quidditch practice three times a week (the hour restriction was Madam Pomfrey's doing, and she was positively draconian when it came to its enforcement). Monday evenings he was at the Charms club, Tuesdays he was usually spending time with his Hufflepuff friends, Wednesday and Thursday he was assisting Jacqueline with the MMN, and Sundays he spent long hours talking to his Ravenclaw friend Terry after Chapel. It made Remus wonder how Harry fit in his studying, because he was clearly doing quite a bit of that, too. Harry was taking Study of Ancient Runes, Muggle Studies and Care of Magical Creatures on top of the regular subjects, and he was doing quite well in all of them (except Potions, but he kind of expected that). He was certainly not slouching on practicing spells. After teaching the third years about Red Caps, he knew why the teachers said Hermione Granger was cleverest student of her age, but Harry was the best at spells.

"He has a very intuitive grasp of spell-casting," said Flitwick when Remus mentioned it over dinner. "Very much like his mother in that aspect. I was rather expecting him to take after James when Minerva told me his talent in Transfigurations."

Remus naturally asked McGonagall about this, because it was rare for his old Head of House to be impressed.

"His approach to Transfiguration is more intuitive than rational," McGonagall confirmed. "He rarely relies on theory and looks for associations when he does the Transfiguration exercises. The method works for him; the only time he had trouble was when I had them transfigure a worm into a lizard last year. He managed once I pointed out their difference as an invertebrate and vertebrate."

Remus started to see this more and more as time went by. Besides his general looks, Harry's mannerisms were extraordinarily like James, from the way he walked, the way he buried his fingers into his messy black hair when he was pouring over his schoolwork, the cat-like way he leaned back into his chair when he stretched, and to the way he jutted his chin when he was feeling stubborn. But then Remus would find him handing out enchanted maps to younger students who were having trouble finding their way around the castle, encouraging Neville Longbottom and Julia Lestrade (both known for having a surprising amount of difficulty learning magic) and talking to the Muggle-borns who were having trouble adjusting. That was all Lily. And whenever he read Harry's essays, he was struck at how he wrote his 'g's and 'y's the same way Lily did.

But Harry had a few oddities Remus couldn't trace back to any of the Potters or Lily. For example, Harry had a habit of splaying his hands next his head exclaiming ' *Think* !' when he was trying to make a point to his friends. He also employed logic as rigorously as Hermione Granger when he wrote his essays, if not as verbosely-not something he expected from one who was so intuitive. Also, while injecting humour to his writing like both of his parents, the flavour of humour was quite different. It wasn't cheeky like James or witty like Lily, but there was a subtle vein of pawky humour Remus learned to guard himself against. Harry also had a rather disquieting habit of abruptly wiping his face clean of all expression, and standing military straight with his hands in loose fists to his sides when he had a reason to feel angry.

"He's imitating his adoptive mother," Jacqueline explained when Remus caught Harry doing the back-straight-loose-fists-to-the-sides stance again at Draco Malfoy's taunting. "They're very close."

"Are you two friends?"

"Yes."

"What is she like?"

Jacqueline grinned briefly. "A lot like him."

The other teachers were similarly vague about Harry's adoptive

parents. McGonagall had a habit of turning thin-lipped whenever his adoptive father was mentioned. Curiously enough, Snape smirked in a non-malicious/derisive way when Jacqueline complained 'J' (as she was wont to call Harry's Muggle mum) spoke of 'the curious incident of the bed sheet in the Buckingham Palace' without explaining what the devil she meant by it. None of the teachers would speak of their names, which made him wonder if they referred them as 'You-Know-Which-Parent' in their minds, like they did Lord Voldemort.

Thus so the days went by. Before he knew it, it was Hallowe'en, which was incidentally the first Hogsmeade weekend for third years and up. Remus had breakfast at his office to avoid Flitwick and Burbage, who kept hinting he should take Jacqueline out for a drink at the Three Broomsticks or tea at Madam Puddifoot's tea shop. He wasn't expecting any visitors.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Remus.

The door opened, and Harry's head poked in warily. Remus did a double take.

"Harry, what are you doing here? Where are Ron and Hermione?"

"They're down at the Great Hall having breakfast," said Harry, in a would-be casual voice. "I just… There was something I wanted to ask you."

"Ah," said Remus carefully. He considered Harry for a moment. "Well, come in. Don't mind the Grindylow; we'll be studying it for our next lesson."

"What's a Grindylow?"

Remus spread a hand to a corner of his office, where in stood a very large tank of water. A sickly green creature with sharp little horns had its face pressed against the glass, pulling faces and flexing its long, spindly fingers.

"Water demon," said Remus, surveying the Grindylow thoughtfully.

"We shouldn't have much difficulty with him, not after the Kappas. The trick is to break his grip. You notice the abnormally long fingers? Strong, but very brittle."

The Grindylow bared its green teeth and then buried itself in a tangle of weeds in a corner.

"Cup of tea?" Remus said, looking around for his kettle. "I was just thinking of making one."

"All right," said Harry awkwardly.

Remus tapped the kettle with his wand and a blast of steam issued suddenly from the spout.

"Sit down," said Remus, taking the lid off a dusty tin. "I've only got teabags, I'm afraid."

"That's fine," said Harry, as he sat down and watched the Grindylow brandishing a fist at him. "Uh, professor," he said suddenly. "You know that day we fought the Boggart?"

"Yes," said Remus slowly.

"Why didn't you let me fight it?" said Harry abruptly.

Remus raised his eyebrows. Of all the questions he thought Harry would ask him, this was the least expected.

"I would have thought that was obvious, Harry," he said, unable to keep the surprise out of his voice.

Harry looked taken aback.

"Why?" he said again.

"Well," said Remus, frowning slightly, "I assumed that if the Boggart faced you, it would assume the shape of Lord Voldemort."

Harry stared. Apparently he had not considered Voldemort to be his greatest fear. Interesting.

"Clearly, I was wrong," said Remus, still frowning. "But I didn't think it a good idea for Lord Voldemort to materialize in the staffroom. I imagined that people would panic."

"I didn't think of Voldemort," said Harry. "I- I remembered those Dementors…"

"I see," said Remus thoughtfully. "Well, well… I'm impressed." He smiled slightly at the look of surprise on Harry's face. "That suggests that what you fear most of all is- fear. Very wise, Harry."

Harry said nothing and wordlessly accepted a chipped mug of tea from Remus.

"So you've been thinking that I didn't believe you capable of fighting the Boggart?" said Remus shrewdly.

"Well… yeah," said Harry, and suddenly he looked a lot happier. "Professor Lupin, you know the Dementors-"

He was interrupted by a second knock on the door.

"Come in."

The door opened, and in came Snape. He was carrying a goblet, which was smoking faintly, and stopped at the sight of Harry, his black eyes narrowing.

"Ah, Severus," said Remus, smiling. "Thanks very much. Could you leave it here on the desk for me?"

Snape set down the smoking goblet, his eyes wandering between Harry and Remus.

"I was just showing Harry my Grindylow," said Remus, pointing at the tank.

"Fascinating," said Snape, without looking at it. "You should drink that directly, Lupin."

"Yes, Yes, I will."

"I made an entire cauldron full," Snape continued, "If you need more."

"I should probably have some again tomorrow. Thanks very much, Severus."

"Not at all," said Snape. He backed out of the room, unsmiling as always when forced to act professionally.

Harry looked curiously at the goblet. Remus smiled.

"Professor Snape has very kindly concocted a potion for me," he said. "I have never been much of a potion-brewer and this one is particularly complex." He picked up the goblet and sniffed it. "Pity sugar makes it useless," he added, taking a sip and shuddering.

"Why-?" Harry began. Remus looked at him and answered the unfinished question.

"I've been feeling a bit off-colour," he said. "This potion is the only thing that helps. I am very lucky to be working alongside Professor Snape; there aren't many wizards who are up to making it."

Remus took another sip as Harry continued to stare.

"You were sick last month too," Harry blurted out.

"So I was," said Remus mildly as he took another gulp of potion.

Harry nibbled on his lower lip, another oddity mannerism. Remus drained the goblet and felt his face and stomach contort.

"Disgusting," he said. "Well, Harry, I'd better get back to work. Have a good time at Hogsmeade. I'll see you at the feast."

"Right," said Harry, putting down his empty teacup. "Uh, Professor Lupin-"

"Yes?"

Harry hesitated for a beat before he plunged in:

"Professor Lupin, are you a werewolf?"

The first thought that rattled inside Remus' brain after Harry blurted out the question he dreaded the most was: *two months* .

Then the crushing despair came as he madly thought, ' *Two months. I only lasted* two months*, how did he figure it out, how could I have slipped, what gave me away this time, no, no, no…* ' until he finally caught himself and steeled himself against the inevitable.

"Why do you think I'm werewolf?" he asked quietly.

"When I saw you at the train," said Harry awkwardly, and Remus felt vaguely relieved he didn't look afraid, "you looked really ill and, uh, your robes were, well, *old* . So I first figured you had some kind of chronic condition… thing… that didn't allow you to work and you don't have any family members who can help you. I asked Madam Pomfrey what kind of condition, but she wouldn't say, and normally she gives me some kind of idea because I want to be Healer. You were healthy for most of September except that one weekend. I checked the Hospital Wing when I heard you were ill, but you hadn't been there. I could tell from the way the beds were made-none of the sheets were freshly laundered, just magically cleaned, and Madam Pomfrey always changes the sheets to fresh ones when she has patients. That's when I started to think something else was going on. Your chronic condition thing doesn't affect you *daily*, obviously, and since you're a very skilled wizard, there's no good reason for anyone not to hire you as long as they're willing to accommodate your sporadic 'sick days'. So why were you not able to find paying work until you got the Defence job, which no one wants because it's jinxed, supposedly? I made a guess there might be some kind prejudice. I asked Terry and he mentioned werewolves. I checked the dates, and the September weekend you were ill there was a full moon. It could've been a coincidence, but-"

"Professor Snape came to my office, bearing a potion on the week when there will be a full moon," Remus finished.

"And your Boggart was a full moon," Harry added.

Remus heaved a sigh. "That was a splendid bit of reasoning."

"My Muggle father taught me how to observe and deduce things," said Harry, looking both pleased and desperately bashful. "I'm not as good as he is."

"I can hardly imagine someone being better," said Remus honestly. "You figured it out faster than anyone I know."

"Sherlock can figure out a person's life story within a minute," Harry muttered.

"Sherlock?"

"Sherlock Holmes," said Harry. "That's my Muggle father's name."

Now Remus had a name, for all the good it would do. "You don't seem very afraid."

"Should I be?" asked Harry, sounding quite bewildered. "You're not a wolf now."

"But I will be later this week."

"Didn't Dumbledore arrange something to make sure everyone is safe?" asked Harry. "That potion Snape made, does it stop you from transforming? No, that can't be it, or you wouldn't be ill…"

"The potion, which is called Wolfsbane, makes me safe. As long as I take it in the week, preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform… I'm able to curl up in my office, a harmless wolf, and wait for the moon to wane again."

Harry nodded thoughtfully.

"What happens when you don't take it?" he asked.

"I become a full-fledged monster," Remus said flatly.

Harry eyes softened, "It must be painful."

Remus felt his throat thicken as he took in the gaze entirely devoid

of fear or distrust. "It is."

There was a short silence.

"I won't tell this to anyone," said Harry firmly. "I was wrong. You're not a werewolf."

"But I am," said Remus, frowning.

"No, you're not," said Harry fiercely. "You're a wizard who - who has a monthly problem…"

Remus couldn't help it-he burst out laughing.

"Sometimes you remind me a lot of your father, James. He called it my 'furry little problem' in company. Many people were under the impression that I owned a badly behaved rabbit."

Harry gaped at him. "You knew my dad?"

"I did, as a matter of fact," said Remus, smiling brightly for the first time in *years* . "We were friends at Hogwarts. He, too, noticed my monthly absences and eventually figured out why. I was afraid to tell him because I thought he might abandon me if he knew. But he didn't. On the contrary, he started to look for ways to make my transformations less painful. The Wolfsbane Potion hadn't been discovered yet when I was a student, you see, so I had to be locked up when there was full moon, away from people I could bite…"

Harry nodded silently with his mouth hanging open.

"He did that?" he whispered.

"Yes," said Remus. "Listen, Harry - I don't know exactly what other people said about James, but that's the man I remember-the one I befriended as a boy."

Harry nodded again. Neither spoke for another beat.

"I believe your friends are waiting," Remus said.

" *Oh,* yeah, right," Harry jumped to his feet. "Thank you so much. I'll

see you later. Bye!"

Harry dashed off.

Remus was still staring at his office door long after he left it.

" *Werewolf*, huh?" said John, "That explains a lot."

It was late in the afternoon, right after Harry and his friends arrived from their first trip to Hogsmeade and visited-everywhere: Dervish and Banges, the wizarding equipment shop, Zonko's Joke Shop, Honeydukes, the Three Broomsticks, and many places besides. Harry was having so much fun roaming around the most picturesque all-wizard village with Ron, Neville and Hermione, buying and eating the most succulent sweets at Honeydukes, staring at the two hundreds of colour-coded owls sitting on shelves at the post-office and studying the interesting patrons of the Three Broomsticks drinking foaming mugs of hot butterbeer, he temporarily forgot about the unexpected, but very significant conversation he had with Professor Lupin. But he was back in the dormitory now and had a bit of time before the Hallowe'en feast, so he called up Sherlock and John told them all about it.

"I always wondered why I couldn't get hold of any of your Dad's old school friends," said John. "Lupin must've felt too awkward to mail us back."

"Why would it be awkward? He did fine this morning," said Harry.

"He was probably alone for too long," said John sagely. "Can you imagine? Almost every single time you get close to someone, they reject you for that one problem you have no control over. It's a very tiring business, rejection, not to mention it hurts like hell. Soon it's hard to see the point of trying at all: All you want is to be liked, but any attempt looks like a failure waiting to happen. Better off not trying; at least you won't face rejection."

Harry knew the feeling all too well. During his worse days at primary school, when his fits alienated him from everyone and made him a

target of the worst bullies, he toyed with the idea of just… giving up. It was only John's fierce and constant reminder that things get better, to never give others the honour of ruining his life, that made him push the terrifying idea aside.

"How did you find out Lupin is a werewolf?" asked Sherlock.

Harry told him how he figured it out. It was the first time he'd attempted a deduction on his own, and he was very nervous about it. He didn't know if he was just lucky or he actually thought it thoroughly enough.

Harry waited anxiously for the verdict when he finished speaking. Sherlock stared at him for a long time with a strange blank look on his face.

"That - was good," he said at last, "Very well thought. Good job."

Harry dropped his phone. He was so happy that he felt as though a large balloon was swelling inside him or he was going to explode into a million pieces. *I did it. I actually did it right* .

Harry had only a vague idea of what happened afterwards. He seemed to remember Ron herding him downstairs to the Great Hall for the feast, but he had no memory of the food or the entertainment. All he could think was one thing in the ringing of his ears:

I did it. Sherlock said I did a good job. I actually did it right .

Final Notes : Snape is no longer Neville's greatest fear, not after Quirrellmort and the Basilisk. Quirrellmort was probably more nightmarish, but the Basilisk is more recent memory, so I went with that (it's also easier think of ways to make it look funny, but I digress).

Sherlock is starting to get the whole Dad business. John is so proud of him.

Shorter chapter this time, but there was so much going on I had to stop here. The real meat of what I planned for third year shall

commence in the next chapter. *You have no idea how much I want to write about it.*

Turns, Trials and Trouble

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Four: Turns, Trials and Trouble

Harry forcefully came back to his senses after the feast, when he and his fellow Gryffindors discovered Sirius Black had tried to enter the empty Gryffindor Tower; tried being the operative word here, because the Fat Lady refused to let him in and he savagely attacked her canvas with a knife in his rage. Professor Dumbledore was able to extract the story out of Peeves, who told him what he knew in an oily voice worse than his normal cackle.

Professor Dumbledore sent all the Gryffindors back to the Great Hall afterwards, where they were joined ten minutes later by the students from Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, who all looked extremely confused.

"The teachers and I need to conduct a thorough search of the castle," Professor Dumbledore told them as Professors McGonagall and Flitwick closed all doors into the hall. "I'm afraid that, for your own safety, you will have to spend the night here. I want the prefects to stand guard over the entrances to the hall and I am leaving the Head Boy and Girl in charge. Any disturbance should be reported to me immediately," he added to Percy, who was looking immensely proud and important. "Send word with one of the ghosts."

Professor Dumbledore paused, about to leave the hall, and said, "Oh, yes, you'll be needing-"

One casual wave of his wand and the long tables flew to the edges of the hall and stood themselves against the walls; another wave, and the floor was covered with hundreds of squashy purple sleeping bags.

"Sleep well," said Professor Dumbledore, closing the door behind him.

The hall immediately began to buzz excitedly; the Gryffindors were telling the rest of the school what had just happened.

"Everyone into their sleeping bags!" shouted Percy. "Come on, now, no more talking! Lights out in ten minutes!"

"C'mon," Ron said to Harry, Hermione and Neville; they seized four sleeping bags and dragged them into a corner.

"Do you think Black's still in the castle?" Neville whispered anxiously.

"Dumbledore obviously thinks he might be," said Ron.

"It's very lucky he picked tonight, you know," said Hermione as they climbed fully dressed into their sleeping bags and propped themselves on their elbows to talk. "The one night we weren't in the tower…"

"I reckon he's lost track of time, being on the run," said Ron, "Didn't realize it was Hallowe'en. Otherwise he'd have come bursting in here."

Hermione shuddered.

All around them, people were asking one another the same question: "How did he get in?" A Ravenclaw a few feet away offered the theory of Apparition, a fifth year Hufflepuff suggested disguises, and Dean Thomas speculated flying.

"Honestly, am I the only person who's ever bothered to read

Hogwarts, A History ?" said Hermione crossly.

"Probably," said Ron. "Why?"

"Because the castle's protected by more than walls, you know. There are all sorts of enchantments on it, to stop people entering by stealth. You can't just Apparate in here. And I'd like to see the disguise that could fool those Dementors. They're guarding every single entrance to the grounds. They'd have seen him fly in too. And Filch knows all the secret passages; they'll have them covered…"

" *How* he got in isn't even the most important question," Harry muttered. "We should be asking *why* ."

Ron, Neville and Hermione frowned at him. "What d'you-" Ron started to ask.

"The lights are going out now!" Percy shouted. "I want everyone in their sleeping bags and *no more talking* !"

The candles all went out at once. The only light now came from the silvery ghosts, who were drifting about talking seriously to the prefects, and the enchanted ceiling, which, like the sky outside, was scattered with stars. What with that, and the whispering that still filled the hall, Harry felt as though he were sleeping outdoors in a light wind.

Once every hour, a teacher would reappear in the Hall to check that everything was quiet. Around three in the morning, when many students had finally fallen asleep, Professor Dumbledore came in. Harry watched him looking around for Percy, who had been prowling between the sleeping bags, telling people off for talking. Percy was only a short distance away from Harry, who quickly pretended to be asleep as Dumbledore's footsteps drew nearer.

"Any sign of him, Professor?" asked Percy in a whisper.

"No. All well here?"

"Everything under control, sir."

"Good. There's no point moving them all now. I've found a temporary

guardian for the Gryffindor portrait hole. You'll be able to move them back in tomorrow."

"And the Fat Lady, sir?"

"Hiding in a map of Argyllshire on the second floor; apparently she refused to let Black in without the password, so he attacked. She's still very distressed, but once she's calmed down, I'll have Mr Filch restore her."

Harry heard the door of the hall creak open again, and more footsteps.

"Headmaster?" It was Snape. Harry kept quite still, listening hard. "The whole of the third floor has been searched. He's not there. And Filch has done the dungeons; nothing there either."

"What about the Astronomy tower? Professor Trelawney's room? The Owlery?"

"All searched…"

"Very well, Severus. I didn't really expect Black to linger."

"Have you any theory as to how he got in, Professor?" asked Snape.

Harry raised his head very slightly off his arms to free his other ear.

"Many, Severus, each of them as unlikely as the next."

Harry opened his eyes a fraction and squinted up to where they stood; Dumbledore's back was to him, but he could see Percy's face, rapt with attention, and Snape's profile, which looked angry.

"You remember the conversation we had, Headmaster, just before-*ah* - the start of term?" said Snape, who was barely opening his lips, as though trying to block Percy out of the conversation.

"I do, Severus," said Dumbledore, and there was something like warning in his voice.

"It seems-almost impossible-that Black could have entered the

school without inside help. I did express my concerns when you appointed-"

"I do not believe a single person inside this castle would have helped Black enter it," said Dumbledore, and his tone made it so clear that the subject was closed that Snape didn't reply. "I must go down to the Dementors," said Dumbledore. "I said I would inform them when our search was complete."

"Didn't they want to help, sir?" said Percy.

"Oh yes," said Dumbledore coldly. "But I'm afraid no Dementor will cross the threshold of this castle while I am Headmaster."

Percy looked slightly abashed. Dumbledore left the hall, walking quickly and quietly. Snape stood for a moment, watching the headmaster with an expression of deep resentment on his face; then he too left.

Harry glanced sideways at Ron, Neville and Hermione. The three of them had their eyes open too, reflecting the starry ceiling.

"What was all that about?" Ron mouthed.

The school talked of nothing but Sirius Black for the next few days. The theories about how he had entered the castle became wilder and wilder; Hannah Abbott spent much of their next Herbology class telling anyone who'd listen that Black could turn into a flowering shrub.

The Fat Lady's ripped canvas had been taken off the wall and replaced with the portrait of Sir Cadogan and his fat grey pony. Nobody was very happy about this. Sir Cadogan spent half his time challenging people to duels, and the rest thinking up ridiculously complicated passwords, which he changed at least twice a day.

"He's a complete lunatic," said Seamus Finnigan angrily to Percy. "Can't we get anyone else?"

"None of the other pictures wanted the job," said Percy. "Frightened

of what happened to the Fat Lady. Sir Cadogan was the only one brave enough to volunteer."

Harry found the opportunity to discuss Black with his closest friends on the Tuesday evening following the attack. He, Ron, Hermione, Neville and Julia slipped into the Music Chamber when Miss Jackie was out of the castle for Small Group, which was the only time other than Sunday when all versions of her was absent.

"No one is asking *why* Sirius Black wants to enter Hogwarts," Harry started, legs crossed, elbows on his knees and hands under his chin, as the five of them sat around in a circle inside a noise cancelling screen. "Yes, I know the Ministry thinks he's after me based on what he said in his sleep, but is he really?"

"Why else would he want to come here for?" asked Ron, wrinkling his nose. "He said ' *he's at Hogwarts* '."

"I know, but…" Harry sighed. "Listen, two summers ago, Sherlock went crazy looking up everything about Voldemort. Remember that?"

Ron and Neville jumped at the mention of Voldemort's name. Julia just shook her head.

"I remember," said Hermione. "You told us at your birthday party. If he was looking up information on You-Know-Who, then he's bound to have found references of Sirius Black. What did he find?"

"The main reason why Black was sentenced to life in Azkaban is for killing thirteen people with a single curse," Harry said. "But there is something *else* he was convicted of: he was the person who told Voldemo- oh, *fine*," Harry sighed when Neville blanched and Ron hissed: ' *don't say his name!* ', "he told *You-Know-Who* where he could find my birth parents after they went into hiding."

Everyone stared at him in shock. Ron in particular was gaping very comically, like a fish stranded on shore eyeing a famished seagull.

" *How can you think Black might* not *be after you when you know this?* !" Neville squeaked.

"Exactly!" said Hermione shrilly. "They say Black was one of You-Know-Who's biggest supporters! His last act cost him everything, plus he gained the wrath of his fellow supporters! *You* are the reason why! *Anyone* would want you dead if they're in his shoes!"

Harry winced at those words. It still stung, even though he expected it.

"So he kills a bunch of other random people and wastes twelve years in Azkaban rather than do something right then and there when he found Hagrid picking me up from the wreckage after You-Know-Who vanished," Harry argued wearily. "Look, I'm just telling you what Sherlock thinks. I think something's off too. Think about it: Black was a Hogwarts student once. So he should know the castle's basic layout and time tables. Even if he is completely insane-and I don't doubt he's touched in the head, not after twelve years in prison-don't you think he'd at least check the *time* before infiltrating Hogwarts? It doesn't take that much time or genius to check the sky, for crying out loud! And what if Black wanted to enter the Gryffindor Tower for different reasons, not because he thought I was there? How could he have found out I was Gryffindor, anyway, if he only managed to enter Hogwarts on Hallowe'en?"

"Aren't you giving Black too much credit?" asked Hermione sceptically. "If he's mad, he won't think this clearly."

"Not necessarily," said Julia. "Mad people can be very cunning. They don't think *clearly* in the sense they don't realize their thoughts are mad, obviously, but for the sake of the thing they're crazy over, they can be pretty clever."

"But he *isn't* thinking clearly!" Hermione argued hotly. "It's obvious from the way he attacked Fat Lady because she wouldn't let him in! If he was thinking clearly, he would've realized he can't enter unless he had the password. If he just left her alone, no one would've known he entered the castle and that would've been better for him!"

"I'm not saying the attack was *clever*," said Julia, frowning. "I'm just saying being mad doesn't make you stupid."

Hermione opened her mouth to argue again, but Neville said

something first.

"You - aren't you angry, Harry? At Black for what he did?" he asked nervously.

Hermione shut her mouth with a click.

There was a horrible, heavy silence.

"I was," said Harry flatly, "I had to go to a therapist for it and everything."

"What's a therapist?" asked Ron.

"A healer who addresses heart issues; like when you experience a terrible shock like death in the family and… well, stuff like that."

"Oh."

There was another terrible, awkward silence. It quickly became unbearable. The talk was rapidly going the worst way possible. Harry didn't know how to deal with it. The fact that he'd known since he was ten his birth parents were probably betrayed to and killed by terrorists thanks to Sherlock (who was only trying to help, however badly), that learning about Sirius Black was more like finally having a name and face to a long held suspicion, was so intricately tied to the darkest period of his life, Harry instinctively shied away from the idea talking about it.

"I'm not-that's not important right now," Harry said finally. "The important thing is figuring out *why* Black chose to infiltrate Hogwarts when he could've gone looking for You-Know-Who. What or who is he looking for? Is he really after me? What is it?"

Ron looked relieved at the change of subject, but Hermione was clearly unconvinced and uncomfortable at Harry's dismissal of the Other Issue. Neville was still worried, but willing to let it go. Julia had that inscrutable look she sometimes put on when things got knotty and complicated.

"Did my grandpa get back to Sherlock after his last visit?" Julia asked.

"He did. He said Fudge told him he met Black on his last inspection of Azkaban. He was shocked at how 'normal' he seemed. Most of the prisoners in there were sitting, muttering to themselves in the dark; there's no sense in them. But Black, he spoke quite rationally to him. Asked Fudge if he'd finished with his newspaper, cool as you please, said he missed doing the crossword. Fudge was unnerved at how little effect the Dementors seemed to be having on him-and he was one of the most heavily guarded in the place, Dementors outside his door day and night."

"What did Fudge mean by 'normal'?"

"Sherlock's question exactly. 'Normal' as in he was acting like someone who isn't a prisoner, or 'normal' as in he was normal for someone who was kept in solitary confinement for twelve years?"

"What else did Sherlock tell you?"

"He said the last bit of outside information Black would've got is from the newspaper Fudge gave him. He wants to know the exact date of the newspaper."

"Can't he make a guess based on the escape date?"

Harry shook his head. "He says there are too many possibilities and not enough data. Capital mistake to theorize before data."

Julia sighed through her nose.

The discussion ended soon after this. As usual, they made no more progress than what Sherlock had already made, and were starting the dreadful, circular arguments when Percy Weasley drew the binds of their screen to tell Harry Professor McGonagall wanted to see him.

Ron, Hermione, Neville and Julia watched Harry walk away, with Percy tailing him like an extremely pompous guard dog. He was rarely left alone since Black's attempt to enter the Gryffindor tower. Teachers found excuses to walk along corridors with him, Madam Hooch was always present during Gryffindor team's Quidditch

practices in the evenings, and the one time he went out to the grounds for his solitary afternoon walks, Hagrid dragged him back into the castle looking very scared and furious. Harry didn't say anything about it, but all the scrutiny and security measures were clearly wearing him thin. Neville and Ron hadn't reported any 'Danger Nights', as the four of them called the times when Harry would sit on the edge of an open window in the boy's dormitory with his feet dangling outside for reasons he was never able to explain, but he was often brooding and uncommunicative as of late, and none of them could tell what he was thinking.

"Sometimes," said Hermione after the door shut, "I want to just pry his head open and see what's going on inside."

"Want to try learning thought-hearing spells?" said Julia wryly. "Though, knowing him, even that won't work."

Ron and Neville heaved a sigh. Sometimes it was very tough being Harry Potter's friend.

In the week following the trip to Professor McGonagall's office-where Professor McGonagall greeted Harry with such a sombre expression on her face Harry thought someone must have died, but it turned out she was just trying to tell him about Sirius Black - Harry kept trying to deduce details from people to see if his one successful case with Professor Lupin was just a lucky break.

He wasn't wrong, most of the time. Of five times Harry tried, consciously, he was right three times.

The first time happened unexpectedly. Harry, Ron and Hermione found Lavender crying one morning at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall. Parvati had her arm around her and was explaining something to Seamus and Dean, who were looking very serious. Harry tried to figure out why before someone would mention it.

Something upset her. Bad news from home, since she has a letter in her hands. Nothing terrible like death in the family, or one of the teachers would be delivering the news. Sickness is a possibility, but

if it's upsetting enough for her to cry over it, McGonagall would've been here. What else would upset Lavender? She likes girly things, Divination, and fuzzy animals. Wait, animals? Does she have pets *?*

"Did something happen to your pet?" Harry asked as he, Ron and Hermione joined the rest of their classmates.

"Yeah, it's her rabbit, Binky. He's been killed by a fox," Parvati whispered. "She got a letter from home just now."

"Oh," said Hermione as Harry went shock-still when he realized his deduction was correct, "I'm sorry, Lavender."

"I should have known!" said Lavender tragically. "You know what day it is?"

"Err-"

"The sixth of November! ' *That thing you're dreading, it will happen on the sixth of November!* ' Remember? She was right, she was right!"

Ron and Harry looked at each other in bewilderment. Hermione asked, "Sorry, but who was right?"

"Professor Trelawney! She made a prediction and she was *right* !"

Oooooh, Harry thought, remembering the day he, Ron and Hermione had gone to interview Professor Trelawney to see if she was the thief trying to steal the Philosopher's stone (the long trek trying to find the Divination classroom was when they'd first found the portrait of Sir Cardogan and his pony). They'd left the interview with the strong impression she was deluded at best and a fraud at worst. Thus, the three of them didn't bother to pick Divinations as one of their additional subjects at the end of second year. Perhaps he, Ron and Hermione should've been more vocal about expressing their opinions; many people taking Divinations treated Professor Trelawney with respect bordering on reverence, Parvati and Lavender had taken to haunting Professor Trelawney's tower room at lunch times, and always returned with annoyingly superior looks on their faces, as though they knew things the others didn't, and had

also started using hushed voices whenever they spoke to Neville, as though he were on his deathbed. It was all terribly annoying.

Harry snapped out of his tangential thoughts to see everyone in his year at the Gryffindor table had gathered around Lavender now. Seamus shook his head seriously. Hermione hesitated; then she said, "You- you were dreading Binky being killed by a fox?"

"Well, not necessarily by a *fox*," said Lavender, looking up at Hermione with streaming eyes, "but I was obviously dreading him dying, wasn't I?"

"Oh," said Hermione. She paused again, then-

"Was Binky an old rabbit?"

"N-no!" sobbed Lavender. "H- he was only a baby!"

Parvati tightened her arm around Lavender's shoulders.

"But then, why would you dread him dying?" said Hermione.

Parvati glared at her.

"Well, look at it logically," said Hermione, turning to the rest of the group. "I mean, Binky didn't even die today, did he? Lavender just got the news today-" Lavender wailed loudly. "-and she can't have been dreading it, because it's come as a real shock-"

"Don't mind Hermione, Lavender," said Ron loudly, "she doesn't think other people's pets matter very much."

Harry didn't need to think too hard to know why Ron said *that* . Ron had been in a bad mood since the previous night when Crookshanks suddenly pounced at his bag where Scabbers was hiding in. Crookshanks tore at the bag trying to get Scabbers. Ron whirled his bag to fling him off, and Crookshanks clung stubbornly to it until Scabbers flew out of the top, streaked through twenty pairs of legs and shot beneath an old chest of drawers. Crookshanks chased after the terrified Scabbers, skidded to a halt at the chest, crouched low on his bandy legs, and started making furious swipes beneath it with his front paw. When Hermione grabbed Crookshanks around

the middle and heaved him away, Ron, with great difficulty, pulled Scabbers out by the tail.

"Look at him!" he had said furiously to Hermione, dangling Scabbers in front of her. "He's skin and bone! You keep that cat away from him!"

"Crookshanks doesn't understand it's wrong!" said Hermione, her voice shaking. "All cats chase rats, Ron!"

"There's something funny about that animal!" said Ron, who was trying to persuade a frantically wiggling Scabbers back into his pocket. "It heard me say that Scabbers was in my bag!"

"Oh, what rubbish," said Hermione impatiently. "Crookshanks could *smell* him, Ron, how else d'you think-"

"That cat's got it in for Scabbers!" said Ron, ignoring the people around him, who were starting to giggle. "And Scabbers was here first, and he's *ill* !"

Ron marched through the common room and out of sight up the stairs to the boys' dormitories. He was still furious at Hermione when they woke up, and the interlude with Lavender was only a short break before Ron and Hermione resumed looking daggers at each other, and when they got into their first class, they seated themselves on either side of Harry and didn't talk to each other for the whole class. It was extremely difficult to feel congratulatory under such circumstances, but he *did* get it right.

The second time was with Ron. Whilst helping a deeply harassed and tired Miss Jackie file the MMN mail orders, Harry noticed Ron knew a lot of haggling and negotiating. He was about to ask Ron directly until he thought about it. Ron was homeschooled until he came to Hogwarts like most children who grew up in magic households. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had *seven* mouths to feed; even at the reduced number during the school year, it was doubtful Mr. Weasley's salary could cover all the expenses. Considering the amount of real estate the Weasleys owed, it was possible Mrs.

Weasley had a side business that sold produce or magical plants that supplemented their income. It was also entirely possible Mrs. Weasley used Ron (and Ginny's) help since they were at home most of time.

"Does your mum run a side business?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, she sells handmade sweets and produce to the local shops, how did you know?" said Ron, looking startled.

"Just wondered," said Harry, smiling and feeling rather pleased. "Do you help her?"

" *All the time*," Ron groaned. "It's mostly counting the money and carrying stuff, though sometimes me and Ginny go door-to-door selling her baked goods for extra allowance. When she goes out to town, I wait until she's done badgering old Blugard the butcher and bullying Mrs. York the baker. I could tell when they were done when I don't hear the shouting."

Harry could picture this all too well.

"So that why you know so much about business operations. You know, I think you have the knack. I wouldn't have even thought about negotiating prices with customers, and, you know, convince them the price is right."

Ron was *extremely* pleased at that comment. It spurred him to suggest to Miss Jackie that she should rely on popular wizard equipment sellers like Dervish and Banges to do the actual promotion and selling of MMN products. This idea turned out to be a stroke of genius: Miss Jackie no longer had to worry about business minutiae related to individual sales, which she absolutely *hated* with a passion of a thousand burning supernovas, and could just focus on making and delivering bulk orders, and Dervish and Banges made good profit selling the massively popular MMN phones and mobile plans. Miss Jackie actually sobbed into Ron's chest when the deal was signed, and wailed she didn't know what she'd do without him. Ron's next paycheck was very generous-but extremely deserving, in Harry's opinion. The only down side was that Ron's interest in school work dwindled in direct proportion to his successes

at the MMN. Harry had no heart to tell Ron that he should at least *try* to keep up, since it would put a damper in the niche Ron could finally claim to be his own, and not something his older brothers had already done before. Instead Harry just advised him to buy ownership shares of MMN. That way Ron would at least have something to fall back to should he actually drop out early.

Harry's third and fourth attempts were with Julia. Arguably, they were actually one attempt. Either way he'd got the details wrong. Harry and Julia had entered the Music Chamber for music lessons. For a moment they thought the Chamber was empty, but that made absolutely no sense because nothing short of death and forced immobilization would make Miss Jackie miss an appointment. So they searched for her.

They found Miss Jackie lying prone on the floor next to the clarinet stands. She looked more woebegone than usual; the skin on her face was almost translucent, her lips were chapped, cheeks were hollow and her eyes looked sunken. It took several rough shakes and dribbling water into her face to wake her up.

"When was the last time you ate something?" Julia demanded the moment Miss Jackie opened her eyes.

Miss Jackie blinked for several seconds as she pondered the question.

"Not fast enough," said Julia when Miss Jackie finally opened her mouth. "You're not working anymore today. Harry, could you ask the kitchens to send something rich and soupy? Preferably something that was simmered with bones for a long time."

Harry nodded. "Blippy!" he called out.

Blippy the house-elf appeared in the Music Chamber with a loud crack.

"Harry Potter!" squeaked the house-elf, bowing low, "How can Blippy help Harry Potter?"

Harry reiterated Julia's request. The house-elf promised to bring a large bowl of beef-stew over immediately (along with the unrequested bread, pumpkin juice and desserts if Harry knew anything about the house-elves of Hogwarts) and cracked out of sight.

"I'm fine, Julia darling," Miss Jackie protested weakly from the floor.

"No, you're *not*," said Julia firmly. "You are so far from fine you need a helicopter to get from where you are to fine." (Harry snorted involuntarily). "You're going eat that soup, and try to stand up again. If you can't, you're going straight to the hospital wing."

Miss Jackie ended up going to the hospital wing after trying and failing to eat the stew Blippy brought. She started throwing up after a few sips, so Harry braved the Floo-network to get the school matron quickly. Madam Pomfrey put her in a stretcher and took her away immediately.

Julia and Harry spent the next hour in the Music Room complaining about idiotic geniuses.

"Yours forget to eat when she's working?" asked Harry (this was the third deduction, which wasn't much of a deduction at all to be honest, but a guess based on what he knew about Sherlock).

"Of course she eats," Julia groused. "If she didn't eat when she works, she would've turned into a decomposing corpse a long time ago. No, her problem isn't *eating* . The problem is she doesn't pay attention to *what* she's eating."

"Oh," said Harry. "So she just picks up whatever, and not bother to check if it's actually food or not." (This was the fourth deduction, made based the one time he'd seen Miss Jackie absently chew on a piece of A4 paper.)

"She's not that bad," said Julia, smiling wryly. "She doesn't keep track of how much of what she ate. If left on her own she could go about eating a single strip of beef jerky for days thinking she ate a whole bunch, or finish off a bag of marshmallows in an hour thinking she only had three. It's ridiculous."

The fifth attempt occurred the day before Gryffindor's first Quidditch match, which was against Slytherin. It was the one Harry was most proud of, though the occasion that brought it about was less than auspicious. The third years had had the most harrowing Defence Against the Dark Arts lessons that day. Lupin was out ill, so *Snape* substituted (whoever thought this was a good idea needed their head checked).

"What's wrong with him?" Ron asked.

"Nothing life-threatening," Snape said, looking as though he wished it were. "Five points from Gryffindor for interrupting. As I was saying, Professor Lupin has not left any record of the topics you have covered so far-"

"Please, sir, we've done Boggarts, Red Caps, Kappas, and Grindylows," said Hermione quickly, "and we're just about to start-"

"Be quiet," said Snape coldly. "I did not ask for information. I was merely commenting on Professor Lupin's lack of organization."

"He's the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher we've ever had," said Dean Thomas boldly, and there was a murmur of agreement from the rest of the class. Snape looked more menacing than ever.

"You are easily satisfied. Lupin is hardly overtaxing you-I would expect first years to be able to deal with Red Caps and Grindylows. Today we shall discuss-"

Harry watched him flick through the textbook, to the very back chapter, which he must know they hadn't covered.

"- *werewolves*," said Snape.

"But, sir," said Hermione, seemingly unable to restrain herself, "we're not supposed to do werewolves yet, we're due to start Hinkypunks-"

"Miss Granger," said Snape in a voice of deadly calm, "I was under

the impression that I am teaching this lesson, not you. And I am telling you all to turn to page 394." He glanced around again. "All of you! *Now* !"

With many bitter sidelong looks and some sullen muttering, the class opened their books.

"Which of you can tell me how we distinguish between the werewolf and the true wolf?" said Snape.

Everyone sat in motionless silence; everyone except Hermione, whose hand, as it so often did, shot straight into the air. Harry, who had been researching werewolves in his spare time ever since that talk he had with Lupin, thus knew a bit about the differences, didn't bother (he wasn't suicidal or masochistic).

"Anyone?" Snape said, ignoring Hermione. His twisted smile was back. "Are you telling me that Professor Lupin hasn't even taught you the basic distinction between-"

"We told you," said Parvati suddenly, "we haven't got as far as werewolves yet, we're still on-"

"Silence!" snarled Snape. "Well, well, well, I never thought I'd meet a third-year class who wouldn't even recognise a werewolf when they saw one. I shall make a point of informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are…"

"Please, sir," said Hermione, whose hand was still in the air, "the werewolf differs from the true wolf in several small ways. The snout of the werewolf-"

"That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger," said Snape coolly. "Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all."

Hermione went very red, put down her hand, and stared at the floor with her eyes full of tears. It was a mark of how much the class loathed Snape that they were all glaring at him, because every one of them had called Hermione a know-it-all at least once, and Ron, who told Hermione she was a know-it-all at least twice a week, said

loudly, "You asked us a question and she knows the answer! Why ask if you don't want to be told?"

The class knew instantly he'd gone too far. Snape advanced on Ron slowly, and the room held its breath.

" *Detention*, Weasley," Snape said silkily, his face very close to Ron's. "And if I ever hear you criticize the way I teach a class again, you will be very sorry indeed."

No one made a sound throughout the rest of the lesson. They sat and made notes on werewolves from the textbook, while Snape prowled up and down the rows of desks, examining the work they had been doing with Professor Lupin and finding fault in everything. When the bell rang at last, Snape held them back.

"You will each write an essay, to be handed in to me, on the ways you recognise and kill werewolves. I want two rolls of parchment on the subject, and I want them by Monday morning. It is time somebody took this class in hand. Weasley, stay behind, we need to arrange your detention."

Harry and Hermione left the room with the rest of the class, who waited until they were well out of earshot, then burst into a furious tirade about Snape.

"Snape's never been like this with any of our other Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers, even if he did want the job!" roared Seamus. "Why's he got it in for Lupin?"

"I don't know," said Hermione pensively. "But I really hope Professor Lupin gets better soon…"

Ron caught up with them five minutes later, in a towering rage.

"D'you know what that-" (he called Snape something that made Hermione say " *Ron* !") "-is making me do? I've got to scrub out the bedpans in the hospital wing. *Without magic!* " He was breathing deeply, his fists clenched. "Why couldn't Black have hidden in Snape's office, eh? He could have finished him off for us!"

No one worked on the werewolf essay that day except Hermione,

who herded Ron and Harry into the library after their afternoon classes to start working on it. To pre-emptively stall her nagging, Harry started reading a book he'd meant to check out days ago, but forgotten about until Snape mentioned werewolves: *Hairy Snout, Human Heart* by anonymous author; a heartrending account of one wizard's battle with lycanthropy.

Harry was about halfway through the book when he looked up so see what his friends were doing. Ron was poring over the MMN accounts as usual. Hermione looked up and their eyes met. She nodded meaningfully. It took an embarrassing amount of time for Harry to figure out what the nod meant: a lunar chart was on the corner of their table, and all the days that had a full moon were circled since September, Hermione's textbook and copy of *Fantastic Beasts* were opened at the werewolf section, and Hermione had scribbled 'boggart' and 'fullmoon' on the corner of her… *oh* . So Hermione figured out Lupin was a werewolf too. Of course.

Then Harry noticed the lump around Hermione's collarbone. A necklace with a pendent, judging from location. But Hermione wasn't the jewellry type. So what made her wear something so frivolous? There was no special occasion for her wear jewellry as far as he knew. So why?

Unbidden, Harry recalled the number of times he'd seen Hermione tucking something inside the neck-opening of her robes after class, particularly when he and Ron had lost track of her for a second. Now that he thought about it, the times she'd vanished was usually when she had two classes or more at the same time. Ron wondered about this mystery more than once, and asked their classmates if she had been missing any classes (she hadn't). Harry didn't think much about Hermione's impossible schedule except to idly wonder if she had finally mastered the cloning/duplication spell, and was sending her clones to attend the magic-free courses like Muggle Studies and Astronomy as he did.

But she couldn't be. Hermione spent every spare moment of her time at the library or in the common room doing her homework when she wasn't at the Charms Club with Ron and Harry, going to music lessons and helping Miss Jackie with the MMN development. There just wasn't enough *time*, even discounting the overlapping

schedules. Unlike Harry, who didn't mind bending the rules as long as it was harmless, Hermione would never do any magic during the summer holidays, so she couldn't have mastered the duplication/ cloning spell over the summer. Moreover, Hermione wasn't the only person who took so many subjects. Percy Weasley got twelve OWLs last year, and in order to get that many, you needed to take all the offered subjects. The whole cloning business only became a viable option when Miss Jackie became an instructor. So what were the older, overachieving students doing in order to take so many subjects? Could they be using some kind of enchanted device that let them be at two places at the same time? If so, what kind of device was it?

Harry studied the lump on Hermione's collarbone again, hoping the shape would lend him a clue. It was longer than it was wider, and the shape was cylindrical, but narrower in the middle. Harry first thought of scrolls until he remembered the thing that made Hermione's schedule impossible: *time* . What time device looked like a cylinder that had a narrower middle? An hourglass. This didn't help Harry figure out what kind of magical device Hermione was wearing that helped her go to all her classes, but it did give him an idea what he should look up.

Harry folded the corner of the page he was reading and got up. He searched through the library indexes and found the section number of the shelves that stored all the books on time magic. When Harry got there, he immediately found the book he was looking for. The front cover had a picture of a shiny hourglass with a chain on it, and the title proclaimed: *Time-Turners and their Mind-turning Mysteries.* A brief browse through the contents told Harry all he needed to know: Time-turners were powerful magical devices that allowed users to go *backwards in time* . Their manufacture, distribution and usage were strictly monitored by the Ministry of Magic owing to its potential danger-people were known to accidentally kill their past or future selves whilst trying to change past events. It would figure a model student like Hermione would be able to get one despite all the red-tape to attend classes.

Harry had just put the book back feeling very satisfied when the library copy of *Hairy Snout, Human Heart* came flying towards him

and started beating him fiercely about the head. Madam Pince, the librarian, was pointing her wand at him, screaming:

" *How dare you desecrate that book, you depraved boy!* "

Harry fled the library. His books, papers and bags flew after him, beating his head as they did. Hermione and Ron joined him outside soon afterwards and helped him subdue his things (getting severely beaten, too, in the process).

"Thanks," said Harry breathlessly.

"Bloody hell, you can't even dog-ear your own books in this place," Ron muttered, before turning at Hermione sharply. "So what were you nodding about?"

"Just giving Harry my approval for starting his homework early for once," said Hermione, a bit too airily, "See, Ron? Even Harry's working hard!"

Ron scowled. Harry just rolled his eyes and said nothing-about werewolves or Time-turners. The day Harry just blurted everything he figured out like Sherlock was the day he'd strap himself on an underground rail and let a Tube train take care of him. If Tube engineers thought he was a selfish bastard, so be it.

This didn't, of course, stop Harry from bragging about the whole thing to John at great length and detail in the privacy of his four-poster bed that evening, starting from Snape's class to his final deduction.

Mr. Lestrade's face popped into view after Harry finished speaking.

"Oi, kid, if you're interested in long hours, undrinkable coffee, horrible tea, even worse pay, and opportunity to fight crime, consider joining Serious Crimes at the CID," he said, grinning rakishly. "I could use someone who has Sherlock's skills, but not his personality."

"That is the worst sales pitch I've ever heard," John declared, roughly shoving Mr. Lestrade out of the away. "Beats the one I used to convince Bill Murray to join the army by a long stretch, and I

promised him miserable pay, abusive superiors, and full guarantee of getting shot at. But I digress." John beamed at Harry. "That-was *amazing* ."

Harry's heart leaped. "You think so?"

"Of course I do. Extraordinary insight-quite extraordinary."

Harry beamed. John's holograph reached out and did a patting motion, like she was ruffling Harry's immaterial, holographic self's head. Harry idly wondered it was possible to magically transmit touch over the MMN.

"So Snape's been quite the… *dargh*," said John, suddenly sombre, and glaring at Mr. Lestrade when he appeared briefly in the background saying the four letter word John scrambled up in a rather loud voice. "If he wasn't such a useful… *pfftt*, and Lupin's reputation wasn't at stake, I would've sent him a Howler. *Forcing* you lot to learn about werewolves outside of schedule, that's a low-blow, even for him."

Harry frowned. "Not more horrible than usual, which is still bad."

"Oh, Harry," said John, looking at him sadly. "Don't you get it? Snape assigned that werewolf essay hoping one of you would figure out Lupin is a werewolf and blow a gasket."

Harry's jaw dropped. Then he swore.

" *Language*," said John mildly before donning an overly serious look. "The miserable… *pahf.* He's been such a bad boy. It's a good thing he doesn't realize tyranny only invites mutiny, otherwise he might've got his wish. Still, no Christmas presents for him for the next ten years."

Harry giggled.

Neville poked his head inside the boy's dormitory to check on Harry. Harry's four-poster had its curtains drawn around the bed and muffled voices filtered through the thick fabric. He tip-toed closer

and listened to Harry use a four letter word and then laugh for a couple of heartbeats before backing away. It gave Neville deeply contradictory idea on Harry's well-being. Harry only used ear-blistering four letter words when deeply upset. However, laughing was always a good sign. Harry wasn't often caught doing it, especially as of late.

Neville sighed. Straightforward as Harry is normally, interpreting his mood can be very challenging at times.

Neville returned to the common room and relayed the information to Ron and Hermione. Both of them were as confused as Neville was.

"Laughing is good," said Ron cautiously. "Maybe he's calling Snape names. That would warrant a laugh."

Hermione was not so optimistic. "The most he'd ever called Snape was an evil B. You've called him *worse* ."

"I still say laughing overrules," Ron argued. "C'mon, Slytherin verses Gryffindor match is tomorrow. Harry hasn't lost match against them. He'll show Snape and that fowl git Malfoy. That's definitely something to look forward to. Okay, I know it's probably going to rain buckets tomorrow, but how bad could it get?"

Ron really shouldn't have said that, Neville later realized. They ought to have known asking how bad things could get when Harry Potter was involved like giving Trouble the finger and daring it to do its worst, to do the scariest thing it can think of.

The most… scariest… thing… I've ever… seen…

That was the thought that dominated Neville's mind as he stared, frozen in horror, at Harry falling off his broom fifty feet in the air after catching the snitch the next day, amidst the muted hush caused by hundreds of Dementors surrounding the pitch, in the pouring rain and howling wind.

Final Notes : Ron and Neville keep a wary eye for *Danger Nights* and Harry slowly blossoms in his talents as detective. I love writing

about these kids. John continues to work very hard to stop swearing in front of Harry. Lestrade is not helping. He and John's left hook may have a serious conversation soon if this keeps up.

Early update for you!

The Heart of the Matter

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Five: The Heart of the Matter

"So from a scale of one to ten, how wretched do you feel?"

That was the first thing Watson said to Severus when he appeared in 221B the day after the utter debacle of a Quidditch match twenty-four hours previous, and Potter's second subsequent fainting spell following a exposure to the Dementors, which of course led to a panic attack and a second trip back to London. Watson gave him a once over, directed him to sit, and went to the kitchen to make an herbal infusion that smelled strongly of chamomile.

"Isn't that a leading question?" asked Severus, taking a seat.

"It's not if you're eliminating the stupid," Watson replied, handing over the cup of hot liquid smelling chamomile to Severus. "You can't tell me you're okay, because you're obviously not. When was the last time you slept without a sleeping aid of some sort?"

"I'm not your patient."

"No, I'm your friend."

Severus exhaled slowly through his nose. There was no doubt

Watson belonged to the resolutely and inflexibly moral species of human and yet, unlike others of the kind, Severus wasn't left gasping and bleeding raw at the constant disapproval of his disinclination (and inability) to meet their moral standards. He, frankly, didn't get Watson's limits. Where did the mercy end and where did the condemnation start? All he knew for sure was that Watson's enjoyment of his company and interest in his wellbeing were quite genuine. As Holmes once said, Watson had no talent for 'fibbing'.

"So what's up?" Watson asked.

"We are no further in catching Black than we were before," Severus grumbled. "The Dementors are no help. Not that it surprises me much. Why would they care if Black is captured or not so long as they have human prey to absorb all things good and positive from?"

"So you prowl around the castle and grounds doing their job for them," drawled Holmes, eyeing Severus in that penetrating fashion that never failed to grate him. "No wonder you're having trouble sleeping. Should we start worrying about your sanity?"

"I have my way of fighting Dementors," said Severus haughtily.

"Of course you do," said Watson, deadpan. "You're obviously doing a great job. Keep at it, Snape, but be careful. I'd hate to lose my second favourite tit."

Severus felt a smirk tugging the corner of his mouth. "Who is the first?"

Watson pointed at Holmes, who looked very pleased at himself.

Severus huffed. "So to business: What do you know about Sirius Black and how far are you in your investigation?"

"You assume we're investigating it."

"Don't be coy, Holmes."

Holmes shrugged. "Hard to conduct an investigation when you refuse to let us view the crime scene and scrub it down before you

even let us *know* there was a crime."

"I see," Severus sniffed. "What is your child's status?"

"Five on the trauma scale. If it doesn't go down to a three by this evening, we're taking him to his old therapist."

"What is a five?"

"Persistent nightmares and insomnia, and accidental magic exploding objects in the flat on an hourly basis."

As though on cue, the human skull on the mantelpiece flew off of its resting place after a small localized explosion. Sighing, Watson scooped up the skull, which sported many cranial fractures, and placed it back on the mantelpiece where the mirror on the back was similarly cracked in many places.

"If that is a *five*, I shudder to think of what is a *ten*," Severus declared.

"You don't want to see it," said Watson darkly. "Trust me."

Severus huffed and took a sip from his mug. The tea tasted flat and almost sour to his palate, so Severus pulled a face. He had just enough manners not to comment on it, just the same way he knew better than to voice his sneering thoughts:

What a weakling ; *dwelling in sad memories and painful recollections like all those who can't control their emotions and put their heart on their sleeves…*

"Shut up," growled Holmes abruptly, "You're wrong."

It would figure Holmes could read his mind without the benefit of magic. "What am I wrong about?"

"You think Harry is weak, mediocre and useless just like his father," Holmes spat. "You're *wrong.* "

"Perhaps it is *you* who is wrong," Snape drawled.

" *Please*," Holmes sneered. "Your puerile attitude towards Harry is pathetically easy to understand. Humans are *depressingly* visual creatures. Even if your rational mind is whispering the contrary, your eyes tell you the child is the same as the father, and recalls all those oh-so-hateful childhood memories. Obvious. That you have never overcome those experiences are *clear* from your determination to catch Black and ruin Lupin. It's *personal* . It's about *revenge* . Again, obvious. There could be nothing else, not for a bully like you."

Severus did his best to hide any reaction against Holmes's cruelly accurate insights.

"And don't bother to deny it-it takes a truly dedicated sort of malice to make Jacqueline lash out."

Now that was an interesting turn of reasoning. Severus admitted that he had no good excuse for his hurtful jabs at Ms. Shin except for the fact her forgiving disposition and shrinking demeanour made her easy prey for his bad moods. At least, he thought so until Ms. Shin, for the second time, stated that his empathy bordered on mind-reading after he snubbed her explanation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) yesterday in the staffroom. Naturally Severus used Legilimency to see if she was hinting what he thought she was hinting, or was merely showing a hitherto unknown sarcastic streak.

He didn't see any thoughts. Instead he had a vision of himself staring down a bottomless abyss, in which an unspeakable creature of horror, possessing neither proper form nor substance, writhed out for a second before it retreated back into the darkness. Despite the fact he should've only seen images at most, not at the level of Legilimens he was performing, Severus *heard* an unholy, inhuman screech echo from the black pit in that vision.

Severus left the staffroom shortly afterwards, completely shaken. Even now, the recollection made him suppress a shudder. What in Merlin's name was that?

But now was not the time to ruminate over the matter.

"I'm disappointed, Holmes," Severus mocked. "Your reasoning is standing on very shaky ground. Could it be you are losing your

touch?"

Severus knew he struck hard, because Holmes' gaze turned into twin blades of steel.

"How old were you when you nosed into Lupin's secret?" asked Holmes in a low, dangerous voice. "How angry were you when Dumbledore decided Lupin's education and wellbeing was more important than your continued existence? Hmm?"

Severus said nothing, but couldn't help but glare venomously at Holmes.

"You're not a subtle man, Snape," Holmes continued relentlessly, his voice like a knife wrapped in velvet. "Even *children* can tell you have a grudge against Lupin. You tried your best to get back at James Potter and eventually you noticed a suspicious pattern in one of his friends. You investigated and eventually *encountered* . Did someone give you a hint? Yes, someone did. Did he suggest to you *where* to look and *when* ? Was that incident how James Potter ended up saving your life? Are you, even now, convinced Lupin was in the scheme? Doesn't matter either way, does it? I'd rather be surprised if you *don't* see the memory of the incident flashing before your eyes whenever you get close to the Dementors…"

"I see why Watson calls you a tit," Severus spat. "What I *do not see* is why Watson hasn't severed all ties with you years ago if this is the way you treat your ' *friends* '."

"Don't presume," Holmes snapped viciously. "I don't have *friends* . Neither do you."

Severus was inching towards his wand when a loud scraping noise interrupted him.

Watson was marching towards the exit. At the doorway, Watson stopped and drew several deep breaths, clutching the frame. Watson's entire body was shaking in a deeply alarming way and the head was bowed.

"… Right," said Watson in an unsteady voice. "Sherlock, I'm going to

assume this is your twisted idea of defending Harry. Snape, for you I'm going to assume you're at the end of your tether because of the Dementors and what they keep making you remember."

Severus held his breath. From the corner of his eye, he could tell Holmes was doing the same.

"If…" the tears in Watson's voice were unmistakable now, "If you can't… give me evidence for my… *assumptions* then tell me to leave. I'll make sure I won't bother you again."

The silence that followed lay heavily in flat, like so much poison gas.

Severus remained frozen where he stood, unable to think of what he ought to do or say. He knew better than to make promises to be 'nicer'. He would make them, try to keep them, but break them when the next rage-inducing incident occurred. What was the point, then? Even now he was deriving perverse and sick pleasure at the prospect of Potter returning to a broken home by the end of term. He and nice just didn't mix.

The silence stretched.

Holmes looked down and worked on his jaw. His full lips were pursed into a thin line. Perhaps it was Severus' imagination, but he looked distinctly pained.

"I've overstepped my boundaries. Forgive me," said Holmes, not looking up.

…

…

… Severus realized he was shocked.

The apology's existence was surprising enough, but the remorse behind it-it sounded real. Clearly Holmes was a better actor than he gave him credit for.

… or he was a better man.

Watson exhaled deeply.

"Don't talk to me right now," Watson snarled. "I'll let you know when it's safe. Snape, your silence is honest enough for me. Now get out. No Christmas presents for you, but I'll send a card. Check your mail."

And with that, Watson went away.

Severus Disapparated shortly afterwards. In his haste to remove himself from the premises, he brought Watson's mug with him.

At least, Severus thought dully as he stared at the iron gates of Hogwarts, he had an answer to the mystery that gnawed on him for the last two years. Why did Watson let him get away with so much? Other concerned parents would've raked him over the coals long ago. The answer was: he wasn't. Watson was simply bending over backwards to accommodate him as a *friend* .

When was the last time someone was willing to do that for you?

Holmes was right; neither of them had *friends* .

They only had one.

Sherlock was seated in his customary leather chair, eyes closed and arms on the rests. The weak, early November afternoon sunlight filtered through the double windows. Aside from the rumble of car engines from the streets, the muffled footsteps from the flat below, water dripping from a tap somewhere and small explosions from upstairs, it was still and silent inside 221B. Sherlock was as immobile as rest of the objects inside the living room; it was as though he became as lifeless as they.

His first movement in hours was that of opening his eyes when his mobile phone chirped. Without checking the phone, he gracefully rose to his feet and strode upstairs to the second floor. He didn't pause to acknowledge the ruined chest of drawers on the mid-landing or the shattered picture frames or the burnt wallpaper on his way up.

Sherlock paused at the bedroom door made to look like a blue police box. It was slightly ajar. Rather than entering, he peered through the crack.

The room inside looked like someone lobbed a crate full of grenades and detonated them one by one. Smoking craters decorated the walls, the posters were singed, the wardrobe in the corner and bedside table were both listing to the side, and the desk was more or less caput. The only piece of furniture that was left miraculously intact was the book case; despite evidence of several explosions that occurred in very close proximity, the case was entirely free of damage. The two people inside the room were also quite unscathed, if tired-looking. One of them was asleep, face-down, and other was sitting next to the bed, running a hand through the sleeping one's hair.

Sherlock drew the door completely open.

John looked back. Harry didn't wake up from the exhausted sleep he'd fallen into. Sherlock stood at the doorway.

"Are we good?" he asked.

"We're good," said John, "You and Snape, absolutely not."

Sherlock relaxed his tense shoulders. "I shan't cry over it."

"No, I don't suppose you will."

Sherlock padded noiselessly inside the bedroom. He took the spare chair, placed it next to John's and sat on it. John leaned in as soon as he did so, resting her head on his shoulder.

They sat like that for a long time.

"So how is the second great break-in to Hogwarts going?" asked John.

"The previous co-conspirator is not amenable, nor has an appropriate excuse for the kind of trip we require."

"So we move onto plan B. How is the prospective co-conspirator?"

"Extremely resistant."

"But he's coming around. He doesn't even flinch at the MMN phones anymore."

"That wasn't the person I had in mind, but the possibility is intriguing."

"Wait, you were talking to *Jack* ?"

John sat straight to stare at Sherlock. Sherlock gave John the 'are you stupid' look.

"Dementors are not fooled by disguises because they sense people through their *emotions* . So, even if we borrow Harry's invisibility cloak, the Dementors would still sense our presence if we use a *legitimate* entry way. All Floo-network connections to Hogwarts from the outside have been shut down because of Black. Therefore, we must find the secret passageway through which Black had accessed Hogwarts this past Hallowe'en. For this, Jacqueline is more than adequate for the job."

John frowned. "Why do you think he used a secret passageway?"

"It is public knowledge Filch the caretaker knows 'all' the secret passageways. Implication: *multiple* secret passageways exist in Hogwarts, most of which are known to one person or another. Hogwarts has security measures that disallow entry via flying and Apparition, and Hogwarts is temporarily disconnected from the Floo-network. Therefore the way to enter is physical entry by foot. We know from last year it is foolish to think someone has exhaustive knowledge of Hogwarts-be it the headmaster or caretaker."

"Chamber of Secrets, case in point; therefore a secret passageway Sirius Black knows about, but Filch and Dumbledore doesn't know or does know but thinks is unusable must exist," said John thoughtfully.

"But House-elves can vanish and reappear inside the castle," Harry said. "What if he's using a House-elf to enter?"

Sherlock and John turned to stare at him. Harry blinked up from

where he was previously thought to be sleeping.

Sherlock let out a guttural sigh, "Obscure first-hand knowledge. I knew it would throw off my reasoning."

"Don't you have to *own* a House-elf for them to follow your orders?" said John, smiling. "Somehow I doubt Black owns one of the Hogwarts elves. And what if this only works for the elves and not for people?"

"Oh yeah…"

Sherlock sighed again.

"Might as well get this over with," he said. "Harry, this part of the case is, as they say, your game."

Harry raised his head and propped himself up low on his elbows. "But-"

"In terms of knowledge of Hogwarts, yours will always be greater than mine," said Sherlock, sounding rueful. "You *live* there. You've walked through the halls, explored the corridors and spoken with the denizens. You've even made a serviceable map! Moreover, you can ask people who have greater knowledge than you and explore the castle yourself. You just have to realize the possibilities. Can you tell me off-hand the persons who may know more about the secret passageways in Hogwarts than Filch?"

"… Fred and George," Harry said slowly. "The House-elves. The ghosts."

"Precisely. *You already know this* . It is a matter of using that knowledge. So ask. Learn *more* . Work your way through. *Think.* Don't worry about your reasoning. You're quite proficient. I'll review your results as needed. Remember, your purpose is learning everything you can about the layout of Hogwarts and finding ways Black could enter."

Harry nodded slowly. He looked so incredibly uncertain-but excited. So excited.

"But don't go alone," John warned. "Just your friends aren't enough, though you definitely want them around. Ask Hagrid to go along with you, or someone else equally suitable."

Harry looked up in thought. "What about Miss Jackie?"

Sherlock and John looked at each other in askance.

"I don't, *ahem*, doubt she can develop a hand-held weapon of mass destruction given enough time and motivation, but I think you want someone who has a bit more firepower and favorable attitude towards physical activities," said John.

Harry tilted his head curiously.

"Jack thinks exercise is a swear word," John explained. "Even hearing it makes her, I quote, want to wash her mouth out with chocolate."

Harry chuckled in amusement. "But she likes taking long walks with me."

"Apparently that's not exercise. No, I don't understand it either."

Harry laughed. "Okay, maybe not Miss Jackie then. I want to though. She's good at making the ghosts talk."

"A second escort, then. Maybe Lupin? He sounds very competent."

"I'll ask," said Harry, sighing a bit. "I want to ask him about the Dementors, anyway."

"Good thinking," said Sherlock, nodding in approval. "There is bound to be methods to fight them."

Harry smiled and turned over to lie on his back. John drew the duvet up to his nose.

"When do I have to go back to Hogwarts?" Harry mumbled under the covers.

"Not today," said John gently.

Harry closed his eyes and exhaled in relief.

Several hours previous, the Gryffindor house Quidditch team congregated at their house table at around dinner time. All faces to a person looked grim. Their fellow Gryffindors and friends from other houses, particularly the younger ones from third-year down, looked equally worried.

"John said they might keep him up to a week," said Ron, clutching his magical mobile phone so hard it was leaving indents on his palm.

"I'm not surprised," said Fred Weasley grimly. "It took him two days to recover from one Dementor. This time there were *hundreds* of them and he fell from-what-fifty feet?"

"I thought he died," said Alicia Spinnet, who was shaking. "If Dumbledore didn't slow him down before he hit the ground… if the ground wasn't so soft… he might've…"

Hermione made a squeaky noise before trying to speak again:

"I've never seen Dumbledore so angry," she said in a quaking voice. "He was absolutely furious. The way he was shouting at the Dementors for entering the grounds…"

"They definitely cleared off real quick," muttered George Weasley. "Though, it might have been the silver stuff he was shooting at them…"

A pause.

"Harry's coming back," Oliver Wood muttered in a low voice. "And we won the match, even though we're only twenty points ahead. That's good news. But if the Dementors come to the next one… I mean, McGonagall might actually put him on reserve. I'd hate to replace him. He's the best Seeker I've ever seen."

"He'll figure something out, Oliver," said Angelina soothingly. "He's pretty resourceful."

"And Harry's the best spell-caster in his year!" piped Colin Creevey.

The Gryffindors talked a bit more after the food appeared. The handful of Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs who'd come over left to join their house-mates. Eventually most of the students cleared off from the Great Hall, to do whatever else they had in mind.

Three third years and two second years stayed behind in the nearly empty Great Hall to discuss something that had been bothering them for a very long time.

"Why do Dementors affect him so badly?" asked Ginny Weasley. Her eyes were bloodshot and she looked white under her freckles. "I mean they're horrible-absolutely *horrible* -but… *why* ?"

"Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," murmured Julia Lestrade.

Everyone looked at her.

"Aunt Jackie said it's probably Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," said Julia.

"Why? What is it?" asked Neville Longbottom.

Julia took a glass cup from the table.

"Say this is your capacity to absorb stress," she said. "You go through your day and stressful things happen- Quidditch practice, homework, classes, a teacher yelling at you-and each time your cup gets fuller and fuller."

Julia took the water pitcher and started pouring water into the glass. When it was almost full, she stopped.

"When your cup overflows," she said, dropping a fork into the glass and thus splattering water, "You blow up. But this is for normal people. For people who have PTSD, it's different."

Julia dumped the water in the glass back into the pitcher. She took several dinner rolls and stuffed it into the glass until it was almost 70% full.

"This is what it looks like for a person who has PTSD," said Julia. "The stress cup is *already* almost full and you can't just dump the cup contents. It's stuck there."

Hermione nodded. "So they blow up quicker for small reasons, because there isn't a lot of space left."

"But Harry doesn't have a short temper," Neville protested.

"Different people have different size cups," reasoned Hermione. "Maybe Harry's is a lot bigger than others. Anyway, when he *does* explode, it's over small stuff and they're pretty spectacular."

"But this still doesn't explain what happens to him with the Dementors," said Ron.

"Yes, it does," said Hermione. "Getting close to a Dementor is like-like using a high-pressure water hose to fill your stress cup: too much all at once. I wouldn't be surprised the PTSD put hairline cracks on the walls."

"But that happens to *everyone*," argued Ron. "Why only Harry so badly?"

"The cup model is just *one* picture," said Julia as she rummaged her tote bag. "Here is another picture Aunt Jackie doodled for me. I think this explains it better."

She put onto the table a white sheet of paper that had two illustrations. On the left hand side the illustration was titled 'Normal', and the one on the right was titled 'PTSD'. Both sides had a mammalian brain drawn over the words 'recognises memory'. On the left side there was a small circle that was labelled 'bad memory trigger'. There was a long wiggly arrow that started from the circle and ended at the brain, taking many twisting turns before it did. The right side had a long curved trapezium (1), also labelled 'bad memory trigger'. The arrow connecting the trapezium to the brain was straight, short, thick and black.

"When you remember something, there's usually a trigger," Julia explained. "Muggles call it stimulus. Like, the smell of butter reminds

you of toast. Cake reminds you of birthdays. The colour of the sea triggers memories of a holiday at the beach. That's for good memories. For bad memories it's a bit different. People instinctively suppress bad memories even when there is a trigger because it's unpleasant. So when Dementors triggers all the bad memories, they come up one by one, stronger one first."

Everyone nodded in understanding.

"The problem with PTSD is that your ability to suppress bad memories is weak," said Julia softly. " *Anything* can trigger it. And when it does trigger, you short-circuit to the bad memory. There are no pauses. So when the Dementor triggers all the bad memories-"

"- *all* of your bad memories come rushing in, all at once," said Hermione in hushed whisper. "It quickly becomes too much. So your brain shuts down."

"Hence the collapsing."

There was a moment of silence.

"All his bad memories," said Ron, looking bleak. "Just off the top my head, I can think too many."

"You-Know-Who," Ginny whispered.

"Surrey Zoo Bombing," Hermione said miserably.

"Foster care," Julia murmured. "It can take months- *years* -before a kid can settle into a family, if ever, and not all of them are good."

"Quirrell and the Basilisk," said Neville in very small voice.

"Now the Whomping Willow shattered his broom," Ron finished.

There was another moment of silence.

"What do we do?" they wondered.

Harry stayed in London for four days. He was very grateful of the time off. Central London was as far from Hogwarts and its magic as Harry could get without leaving the UK, both physically and metaphorically. 221B was small- barely enough to fill one of Hogwarts' larger classrooms- and, being a Muggle flat in the city, had no garden or growing vegetation to speak of and everyone used electronics, biros and paper here. There were only three adults around at most, and all of them were Muggles, two whom which were John and Sherlock. Harry appreciated the last one the most. It was nice not having to face well-meaning people who didn't understand what it was like asking stupid questions such as 'how are you?' or 'how are you feeling?', but have Sherlock rake his eyes over him and deduce the answers without saying a word and have John, who *did* know what it was like to have horrible memories lurking just behind the surface, let him *forget* with lots of tussling around in Regent's Park (Harry wasn't sure if he could handle flying even if his broom had survived, as much as he loved his faithful Nimbus and mourned its demise).

Harry was able to talk about what happened to him when the Dementors came to the match on Tuesday evening. He mostly recalled voices and smells: Aunt Petunia screaming at him, blaming him for the situation they were in; the high-pitched voice coming from the earpiece dictating what he should say; screams of dying people after the bomb went off at the zoo; the smell of burning human flesh, so much like over-cooked bacon. But the worst-the absolute worst-was hearing the screaming voice of his birth mother during the last moments of her life, her attempts to protect him, Harry, from Lord Voldemort, and Voldemort's laughter before he murdered her…

Harry didn't finish his disjointed summary. The lump in his throat got too large. At any rate, John crushing his face in her bosom stopped him from having to continue.

The silence that followed was only broken by the sound of John drawing long, unsteady breaths to hold back her anger-or tears. Harry looked up when John's hold loosened. John was breathing normally, but the cheeks were wet and the lips were set into a harsh line. Sherlock was standing very close without touching and his

expression was like a carved limestone.

"I have to go back," whispered Harry.

"Yes," Sherlock said quietly. "Just be careful."

The Wednesday morning Harry was to return to Hogwarts dawned cold and colourless. Miss Jackie, who was going to escort him back, arrived at 221B not a minute late. Harry thought she looked grey and it wasn't just because of her clothes: except for the bleach-white blouse, she was wearing a charcoal suit, a light carbon-coloured Burberry coat, a shimmery silver circle scarf and jet-grey boots that were almost black.

"Loving the grey?" John commented.

"Yes," said Miss Jackie. "And I see your love for imitating seventy-year-old pensioners is as strong as always."

Harry thought that was a pretty nice comeback until he noticed Sherlock and John had turned rather grave.

"She's making fun of my clothes now," John muttered. "The Dementors are affecting her worse than I thought."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, while Sherlock questioned Miss Jackie over the large iron key she was holding.

"Jackie has to go to Hogsmeade for her twice-weekly trips to London," explained John. "That's two exposures to Dementors each week. Jack usually keeps all unkind urges under tight control, but it's obviously slipping- you could qualify making fun of clothes as unkind."

Harry thought if the most Miss Jackie could manage on the unkindness scale was lightly making fun of other people's clothes, it wouldn't hurt for her to be a bit mean-spirited on occasion. He also felt sobered at the sheer amount of dedication Miss Jackie poured into meeting the small group ladies and church, and wondered what the Dementors were making her remember.

"I think you should definitely include Jack in your castle exploration trips," said John. "It would distract her from her dark philosophical thinky-thoughts. When in doubt, act like you don't understand."

"Okay," said Harry nodding.

John smiled and gave him a hug, "See you at Christmas."

Miss Jackie came over after she was done speaking to Sherlock. Sherlock, of course, just gave Harry a nod instead of any visible/ audible farewells, but that was very normal.

"This is a portkey," she said, holding up the key. "In some ways, it's better-and worse-than Floo-powder. Just put your finger on it."

Harry touched the key as instructed. It felt weird doing this.

"Any moment now," said Miss Jackie, checking her watch. "One… two… three…"

Harry felt a violent forward jerk around his navel when she counted four. His feet left the ground; he could feel Miss Jackie's thin arm around his back as her bony frame kept bouncing off him; they were speeding forward in a howl of wind and swirling colour; his forefinger was stuck to the key as though it was pulling him magnetically onward and then-

His feet slammed into the ground. Miss Jackie staggered into him and almost fell over. The portkey flew out of her hand and bounced off the Entrance Hall floor.

"Why does magical transport have to be so uncomfortable?" Harry complained as he helped Miss Jackie regain her balance.

"To discourage us from travelling," Miss Jackie grumbled. She then stumbled over and picked up the key. Once Miss Jackie gathered her bearings, they entered the Great Hall together.

The noise and bustle of the main school ceased for a moment as all eyes turned to Harry in shock. All except Malfoy, who started to do a spirited imitation of Harry falling off his broom at the Slytherin table, inciting a roar of laughter from his fellows. Harry was honestly

expecting something worse, but then he went to primary school where the mean kids used to make sport of holding down their victims, pulling off their trousers and pants, and posting the photos of the poor victims in their skivvies from waist down on Facebook. He supposed he should be grateful Malfoy and the rest of his Slytherins lacked imagination, but it still grated him.

"Hey, Potter!" shrieked Pansy Parkinson, a Slytherin girl with a face like a pug. "Potter! The Dementors are coming, Potter! Wooooooooo!"

Harry dropped into a seat next to George Weasley at the Gryffindor table, where Hermione and Neville were restraining an irate Ron. The latter three froze when they saw Harry and appeared to be driven speechless.

"Alright, Harry?" said George, passing over the porridge bowl as though Harry just showed up for breakfast as always and hadn't been absent for four days. "What's up with you, Ron?"

" *Malfoy*," said Ron, glaring over at the Slytherin table.

George looked up in time to see Malfoy pretending to faint with terror.

"That little git," he said calmly. "He wasn't so cocky last Saturday when the Dementors came. Couldn't get off his broomstick fast enough, didn't he, Fred?"

"Nearly wet himself," said Fred, with a contemptuous glance at Malfoy.

"I wasn't too happy myself," said George. "They're horrible things, those Dementors…"

"Sort of freeze your insides, don't they?" said Fred.

"You didn't pass out, though, did you?" said Harry in a low voice.

"Forget it, Harry," said George bracingly. "Dad had to go out to Azkaban one time, remember, Fred? He said it was the worst place he'd ever been, he came back all weak and shaking… They suck

the happiness out of a place, Dementors. Most of the prisoners go mad in there."

"Anyway, we still won that last match," said Fred. "We're only twenty points ahead, mind you, but victory is still a victory. We're still in decent standing to win the Quidditch cup. Malfoy can take that and suck on it."

Malfoy had definitely come off worse both times he and Harry faced each other in a Quidditch match. After the first time, Flint, the Slytherin team captain, yelled at Malfoy for not noticing the snitch that was right on top of his head. The second time and more recently Harry beat him in the race after the Snitch despite having a head start and a better broom. Feeling more cheerful, Harry helped himself to eggs and fried tomatoes.

"You're looking a lot better," said Ron, watching Harry closely. "Did Sherlock find anything new?"

Harry told Ron, Neville and Hermione about his plan to explore the castle and find ways Black could've entered Hogwarts-a secret passageway most likely. George and Fred listened in, looking very interested.

"You're not worried about figuring out *why* Black wants to enter the castle anymore?" asked Hermione, peering anxiously into his face.

"Sherlock is taking care of that," said Harry. "This is something he *can't* do. We're going to share notes as we go."

Ron nodded. "True enough. But how are we going to do it? I don't think the teachers are going to be keen about us wandering around the castle on our own."

"Yes, it might be dangerous," said Hermione, exchanging a look with Ron. "Listen, Harry, we've been thinking-"

Harry could tell they had rehearsed the conversation to follow while he had been away. He wasn't sure if he wanted to hear it.

"I'm going to ask Hagrid if he can accompany us," said Harry before Hermione could continue.

"-Oooh, good idea," said Hermione, her obvious relief overruling any annoyance over his interruption. "Anyone will think twice before they go after *Hagrid* ."

"Better safe than sorry and all that," Ron quickly agreed.

"And the faster we solve the Black situation, the better," said Harry as he attacked his fried tomatoes. "Once we figure out how he might've got in, we can tell Dumbledore. If we're lucky, Black might get cocky and use it again. The Dementors won't have a reason to stay here once they've got him. Good riddance to both."

Everyone nodded fervently. Fred and George in particular looked very keen.

Julia came over from the Hufflepuff table.

"Had a nice break, Harry? Lots of beauty sleep?" she asked, sitting down next to Neville.

"Yes, I feel very beautiful right now," Harry replied.

Julia smiled. "I did think your skin was glow-y."

Ron sniggered.

"Three months and even *knowing* where he is headed you still can't find him? What kind of idiots are you? *!"*

Sherlock ranted as he paced furiously inside Lestrade's office. Lestrade gave John a pleading look.

"Sorry, he used up his maturity quota for the week," said John ruefully. "Better luck next time."

Final Notes : I've wondered how the Dementors affected the *adults* of HP. Snape, the paranoid bat bent on revenge that he is, probably did more patrols than all of the teachers combined in hopes to catch

Sirius. The Floo connection shutdown is my own thing, but it made sense to me from a security standpoint. Sherlock verses Snape. So cruel. So very hurtful. I cringed over every sentence.

The explanation of PTSD is very incomplete. Jacqueline did the best she could for a precocious twelve year old without being an expert herself.

(1) trapezium: *trapezoid* for you US people. So much math and science in a fanfic about *magic,* I tell you…

The deeply annoying, but inevitable thing about writing long chapter fics is that, no matter how thoroughly you plan the plot, the actual writing often throws those careful plans straight out of the window. This chapter case in point. It was so difficult to write, and yet so, so necessary. Oh well. Perhaps I'll get to use my original plans in the future…

Consequences of Ideas

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Six: Consequences of Ideas

When Sherlock told him to go find the secret passageways in Hogwarts, Harry imagined long, exciting excursions looking for unknown places inside the castle with his friends and Hagrid and perhaps Miss Jackie if she felt up to it.

The Weasley twins changed all that. After the first Quidditch practice Harry participated since the match against Slytherin, Fred and George stopped him outside the lockers.

"We have something to show you, Harry," said Fred, with a mysterious wink. "Come along."

Curious, Harry trotted after Fred and George, who walked across the grounds, entered the castle and went up to the third floor. Harry followed Fred and George inside an empty classroom left to a statue of a humpbacked, one-eyed witch. George closed the door quietly and then turned, beaming, to look at Harry.

"Consider this either a very late birthday present or an early Christmas gift," he said. "Show him, Fred."

Fred pulled something from inside his cloak with a flourish and laid it

on one of the desks. It was a large, square, much worn piece of parchment with nothing written on it. Harry stared at it, suspecting a joke.

"What's that supposed to be?"

"This, Harry, is the secret of our success," said George, patting the parchment fondly.

"It's a wrench, giving it to you," said Fred, "but we decided last night, your needs are greater than ours."

"Anyway, we know it by heart," said George. "We don't really need it anymore."

"Why would I need a bit of old parchment?" said Harry.

"A bit of old parchment!" said Fred, closing his eyes with a grimace as though Harry had mortally offended him. "Explain, George."

George spun a yarn of him and Fred noticing a filing cabinet marked *Confiscated and Highly Dangerous* inside Filch's office when the caretaker brought them in and threatened detention (and disembowelment) for dropping a Dungbomb in a corridor when they were young, carefree and innocent first years. True to form, George caused a diversion by dropping another Dungbomb and Fred whipped the drawer open and grabbed the parchment.

"It's not as bad as it sounds," said George. "We don't reckon Filch ever found out how to work it. He probably suspected what it was, though, or he wouldn't have confiscated it."

"And you know how to work it?"

"Oh yes," said Fred, smirking. "This little beauty's taught us more than all the teachers in this school."

"You're winding me up," said Harry, looking at the ragged old bit of parchment.

"Oh, are we?" said George.

He took out his wand, touched the parchment lightly, and said, " *I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.* "

And at once, thin ink lines began to spread like a spider's web from the point that George's wand had touched. They joined each other, they crisscrossed, they fanned into every corner of the parchment; then words began to blossom across the top, great, curly green words, that proclaimed:

Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs

Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers

are proud to present

THE MARAUDER'S MAP

It was a map showing every detail of the Hogwarts castle and grounds. But the truly remarkable thing was the tiny ink dots moving around it, each labelled with a name in minuscule writing. A labelled dot in the top left corner showed that Professor Dumbledore was pacing his study; the caretaker's cat, Mrs. Norris, was prowling the fourth floor; and Peeves the Poltergeist was currently bouncing around the trophy room. As Harry's eyes travelled up and down the familiar corridors, he noticed something else.

This map showed a set of passages he had never entered. And many of them seemed to lead-

"Right into Hogsmeade," said Fred, tracing one of them with his finger. "There are seven in all. Now, Filch knows about these four"- he pointed them out- "but we're sure he doesn't know about these. Don't bother with the one behind the mirror on the fourth floor. We used it until last winter, but it's caved in-completely blocked. And we don't reckon anyone's ever used this one, because the Whomping Willow's planted right over the entrance. But this one here, this one leads right into the cellar of Honeydukes. We've used it loads of times. As you might've noticed, the entrance is right outside this room, through that one-eyed old crone's hump."

Harry stood there, gazing at the miraculous map. Then he looked at

the twins.

"How did you figure out how to work it?"

"We *asked* it," said Fred. "The thing about enchanted objects is that they want to be *used* the way it was intended."

"We tapped it with our wands and asked it to reveal its secrets," George explained. "After a few tries, the parchment started writing back to us. Mr. Moony asked what for. Fred said because we were curious. Mr. Padfoot asked if we were up to no good. I said yes. Mr. Prongs asked if I would solemnly swear I am up to no good. When I said so after taping the parchment with my wand, the map appeared."

Harry nodded slowly. Who would've thought merely asking could do the job? But-

"Why are you giving me this?"

"For information-" Fred started.

"-and inspiration," George finished. "You see, the map is second to none when it comes to learning the floor plans and goings-on of Hogwarts, but you have to *look* at it to get the information. Monitoring a parchment 24-7 no matter how cool gets old quickly. Try as we might, we couldn't figure out how to add more features to the map."

"So you want me to-"

"Find a way to improve it," said George. "Or make something even *better* . The holographic map of yours is pretty cool."

"If you can make your map show who's in Hogwarts and what their names are like the Marauder's map, and alert you when someone, say, *unexpected* shows up, that would be even more cool," said Fred.

Harry nodded. Yes, that would be cool; very cool, as a matter of fact…

"Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs," sighed George, patting the heading of the map. "We owe them so much."

"Noble men, working tirelessly to help and inspire a new generation of lawbreakers," said Fred solemnly.

"Right," said George briskly. "Don't forget to wipe it after you've used it-"

"-or anyone can read it," Fred said warningly.

"Just tap it again and say, ' *Mischief managed!* ' And it'll go blank."

"So, young Harry," said Fred in an uncanny impersonation of Percy, "I expect great things from you."

"Have fun," said George, winking.

They left the room, both smirking in a satisfied sort of way.

Harry stood alone in the room, staring at the map. He watched the tiny ink Mrs. Norris turn left and pause to sniff at something on the floor. It was amazing no matter how much he looked at it. What kind of spell did the Marauders use to track the people inside Hogwarts? How did the map reveal their names? Where would he have to look in order to find the necessary spells? What kind of spells would he have to learn? How could he stop any additions from interfering with the existing magic? As the questions piled up, the more daunting the challenge looked.

Single concepts, Harry, said the Sherlock voice in his head. *Spells only work properly when there is only one concept to focus on.*

Harry started to break it down. Spell one: reveal who is here. Spell two: reveal their names. Spell three: go blank when tapped with password. Spell four: reveal map when tapped with password. None of these were so heavy-handed that they would work against other spells. He'd done something very similar to make his Holographic map. The principle was the same: Break down the tasks to the smallest and simplest idea, and then add the spells one by one according to their dependencies.

Harry rolled up the map, stuffed it inside his robes, and hurried to the door of the classroom. He opened it a couple of inches. There was no one outside. Very carefully, he edged out of the room and behind the statue of the one-eyed witch. Then he unrolled the map to see what it could tell him about the hidden passageway that lead to the cellar of Honeydukes.

Harry marvelled when the map showed him a new ink figure about where he was standing in the third floor corridor. He felt oddly pleased the figure was labelled 'Harry Watson' instead of 'Harry Potter'. His little Ink-self tapped the witch with his minute wand, and the tiniest speech bubble appeared next to his figure. The word inside said, ' *Dissendium* .'

"Dissendium!" Harry whispered, tapping the stone witch with his real wand.

At once, the statue's hump opened wide enough to admit a fairly thin person.

Harry let out a long breath as he stared at the opening. He glanced quickly up and down the corridor to make sure it was still empty. Then he raised the map, tapped it with the tip of his wand and muttered, " *Mischief managed* !" The map went blank at once. Then he tapped the statue again and the hump returned to its place. Harry folded the map carefully, tucked it inside his robes, then, heart beating fast, he raced back to the Gryffindor tower.

He found Ron and Hermione in the common room. He quickly herded them to a discreet corner and told them about the Marauder's map.

"How come Fred and George never gave it to me!" said Ron, outraged. "I'm their *brother* !"

"But Harry isn't going to keep it!" said Hermione, as though the idea were ludicrous. "He's going to hand it in to Professor McGonagall, aren't you, Harry?"

"Are you mad?" said Ron, goggling at Hermione. "Hand in something that good?"

"If I hand it in, I'll have to say where I got it! Filch would know Fred and George had nicked it!" Harry argued.

"But what about Sirius Black?" Hermione hissed. "He could be using one of the passages on that map to get into the castle! The teachers have got to know!"

"Fred and George didn't give the map to me just so I can hand it over to the teachers," said Harry indignantly. "They wanted me to reverse engineer it and improve it! Don't you want to figure out how it works?"

"Yes, but- but-" Hermione seemed to be struggling to find another problem. "That doesn't stop us from telling Professor McGonagall about the secret tunnel! And what if Sirius Black turns up today? Now?"

"Same problem as handing in the map; McGonagall will want to know how I found it out."

"Come on, Hermione," said Ron, "This is valuable info. We need this too. At least until we can copy the features?"

Hermione bit her lip, looking extremely worried.

"Are you going to report me?" Harry asked her, grinning.

"Oh- of course not- but honestly, Harry-"

"So what are we going to do?" said Ron, looking very excited.

"First, we tell Sherlock about the breakthrough," said Harry, brandishing his phone. "Then we check all the floor plans on the Marauder's map and add the missing stuff to *our* map before someone finds out…"

Lestrade felt a stab of jealousy as John and Sherlock crowded the other side of the morgue to talk to Harry over the MMN. The last time he'd talked to Julia was two weeks ago, and it had been short and perfunctory. It was as though she was fast running out of things

to say because she was now too cool for her daddy.

"Excellent," Sherlock rumbled in approval, "You're making good progress."

"We're going to examine each floor tomorrow and see if the info checks out," said Harry brightly. "Should I send you a copy of our new map?"

"Yes, that would be perfect."

Lestrade looked away. He knew it was going to happen sooner or later, but he hoped he could milk out at least two more years of adoration.

"You stink of envy," Robert Ju murmured quietly from where he was examining the body of Ann Nichols, the first victim of the Embalmer. On the other side of the chilling room's glass window, the two Ministry of Magic wizards who brought in her magically preserved corpse were looking decidedly green as they watched Robert in action between their trembling fingers.

"If I wanted another person who can figure out my inner thoughts, I'd say so," Lestrade growled, glaring at the grey and vaguely pink tartan pattern suit jacket Robert was wearing.

Robert blinked up at him.

"You mean there was a better way of bringing up the subject. I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Lestrade felt himself deflate a little. Robert may have the social grace of a five-legged giraffe that had two deformed ankles and an amputated foot, but he could act professional, at least temporarily, and unlike another genius he could name, he didn't have problems apologising when he was wrong.

"Just-stop saying stuff like that in front of other people," Lestrade said gruffly. "It's creepy enough as it is it."

"Noted."

Robert resumed his examination of the corpse and Lestrade his brooding.

"You don't like magic," Robert pronounced.

"Just because I have it, doesn't mean I have to like it," Lestrade retorted.

"In short, anything related to magic for you is bad news."

"Well, yeah."

"You love your daughter and for her sake you tolerate it."

"Is there a point to all this?" asked Lestrade testily.

Robert paused for a second.

"Maybe your daughter is trying to spare you unnecessary bad news, which in your case is *magic* ."

Lestrade stared at him.

"Food for thought," said Robert without looking up.

Harry woke up the next day thoroughly determined to start the Marauder's map verification and holographic map update. Nothing was going to stop him, Harry vowed as he ate breakfast with gusto.

He was promptly derailed the moment he saw Professor Lupin at Defence Against the Dark Arts class that morning.

It was the first time he'd seen Lupin within a week after the full moon. He looked more exhausted than back in the train, there were more greys in his hair, and his old robes were hanging loosely. No one would've doubted he had been ill, though perhaps not for the reasons one may assume.

"He really doesn't look well," Harry muttered as he sat down.

"He looked worse on Monday," said Ron. "So I guess that means

he's getting better?"

But Harry was far from assured. *Hairy Snout, Human Heart* had talked about the immense toll werewolf transformations put on a wizard's body. The author said he felt like he'd aged *years* after a full moon and quickly started to look like he was-just like Lupin. All his joints were ruined after too many shifts, which eventually made him hobble around like an old man. The epilogue of the book said the author had passed away after forty years of battling lycanthropy. Harry didn't know when Lupin was bitten, but he must have been very young when it happened, because he already had lycanthropy when he'd entered Hogwarts. That meant Lupin had already lived with the curse for over twenty years. Could it be Lupin only had twenty more years to live?

Harry went through the otherwise enjoyable lesson studying Hinkypunk very distracted. When the bell rang, everyone gathered up their things and headed for the door. Harry lingered, his mind preoccupied with dark thoughts.

"Wait a moment, Harry," Lupin called. "I'd like a word."

Harry went over and watched Professor Lupin covering the Hinkypunk's box with a cloth.

"I heard about the match," said Lupin, turning back to his desk and starting to pile books into his briefcase, "and I'm sorry about your broomstick. Is there any chance of fixing it?"

"No," said Harry. "The tree smashed it to bits."

Lupin sighed.

"They planted the Whomping Willow the same year that I arrived at Hogwarts. People used to play a game, trying to get near enough to touch the trunk. In the end, a boy called Davey Gudgeon nearly lost an eye, and we were forbidden to go near it. No broomstick would have a chance."

Harry's brain latched onto the fact the Whomping Willow, a very violent tree that stood alone in the middle of the grounds, was

planted the same year as Lupin arrived at Hogwarts, and that there was a secret passage beneath the Whomping Willow. He didn't think this was a coincidence.

"Um, Professor Lupin," said Harry cautiously. "Does the planting have anything to do with your-?"

Lupin looked at Harry quickly. After studying his face, Lupin relaxed a bit.

"I keep forgetting how sharp you are," he said. "I supposed you know there is a secret passage that starts at the Whomping Willow and ends at the Shrieking Shack?"

Harry didn't know the passage ended at the Shrieking Shack, the most haunted place in Great Britain supposedly. But he nodded since he knew the passage led to Hogsmeade, where the Shrieking Shack was located.

"I was taken to Hogsmeade each month for my illness when I was student," said Lupin calmly. "The rumours that particularly violent spirits were haunting the Shack started around that time. Dumbledore may have encouraged the rumour to keep people away."

"That's very clever," said Harry.

Lupin smiled wryly. "I suppose so."

"How did you enter the passage?"

"I don't think I should tell you that," said Lupin, his eyes twinkling. "Not when I'm a teacher."

"Oh. Right," said Harry, feeling a bit let down. Then he shrugged. He'll just consult the Marauder's map. Hopefully the map had that bit of info too.

"Well, it seems like you're not dwelling on the match," said Lupin, thoughtfully. "But you seemed rather distracted today. What was on your mind?"

"Well I thinking… about stuff…"

"Such as?"

Harry hesitated. He didn't think he could voice his worries over Lupin's monthly werewolf problem, not in a semi-open classroom where people could eavesdrop. He supposed he could mention the Dementors as he had meant to ask Lupin about them, but now that the moment had come, he felt too embarrassed. What if Lupin thought he was just weak? As the silence stretched on, the feeling he'd missed his cue got stronger.

Then Harry decided what the hell.

"You made that Dementor on the train back off," he said suddenly.

"There are- certain defences one can use," said Lupin. "But there was only one Dementor on the train. The more there are, the more difficult it becomes to resist."

"What defences?" said Harry at once. "Can you teach me?"

"I don't pretend to be an expert at fighting Dementors, Harry- quite the contrary…"

"But if the Dementors come to another Quidditch match, I need to be able to fight them-"

Lupin looked into Harry's determined face, hesitated, then said, "Well… all right. I'll try and help. But it'll have to wait until next term, I'm afraid. I have a lot to do before the holidays. My illness came at a very inconvenient time."

Lestrade spent many busy weeks working closely with Arthur, Kingsley and the Baker Street prats since the thought provoking conversation with Robert. The Embalmer case officially transferred to him after Morton was obliviated for the umpteenth time by Obliviator Smith, who couldn't navigate the non-magical world incognito even if his life depended on it. With Lestrade in charge, Smith could go on committing the most egregious faux pas without

compromising the Statute of Secrecy, which meant the Yard could finally make some tangible progress on the case.

The Embalmer case wasn't all that hard to crack down as long as the wizards didn't make the police officer in charge forget what they knew to cover up the blatantly wizard thing Smith had done ten minutes ago. Hospital security footage showed who interacted with the three non-magic victims before they died, so Forensics was able to get plenty of visuals of the man who placed the potion that killed them. Based on the payroll records the Hospital provided, the security footage, and the highly volatile nature of the administered poison, Lestrade determined the Embalmer was actually a two person team: one was largely in charge of the potion related work and his/her partner did the actual administering and body-snatching.

Kingsley turned very grave when Lestrade told him about the team thing.

"Are you sure about this?"

"There's no other explanation," said Lestrade grimly. "The perp caught on camera worked thirty-hour shifts twice a week, and judging from the number of times he showed up on tape, he stuck around for most of it. That's too long to stay away from the cauldron or so Robert tells me. He said the customized nature of the poison made the stuff highly perishable and volatile; for it to be as effective as it was the perp would've had to monitor his cauldron constantly, administer the potion as soon as it finished brewing and reapply as often as possible."

Kingsley turned graver still.

"What's wrong?"

"The primary difficulty of catching the Embalmer is that he's too quick and too patient," said Kingsley, "He goes underground the moment the investigation against him gets hot. Then he starts again when the case goes cold."

Lestrade stared. "Smells like insider information."

"It does," Kingsley shook his head, "At least we know we're dealing with two, not one. Thanks Lestrade. You have no idea how much effort you saved us."

Lestrade smiled crookedly.

"You're welcome. Now can you do me a favour and tell me how the bloody hell am I supposed to explain all this to my very Muggle Super? And if I catch Culverton leering at the lady's with his magical eye again, I'm going to pry it out of his socket and shove it up somewhere a lot less comfortable."

Arthur followed up and gave Lestrade a list of potion ingredient suppliers that checked out from the non-magic end. Since all the half-digested ingredients they'd recovered from Ann Nichols' body were poisonous and the suppliers confirmed repeat purchases of those ingredients, he was able to establish a probable cause of death. That was the good news. The bad news was working with Arthur brought him straight into the realm of magical hate crime, starting with shrinking door keys.

"Why would anyone bother making door keys shrink?" said Lestrade incredulously.

"Just Muggle-baiting," sighed Arthur. "Sell them a key that keeps shrinking to nothing so they can never find it when they need it… Of course, it's very hard to convict anyone because no Muggle would admit their key keeps shrinking-they'll insist they just keep losing it. Bless them, they'll go to any lengths to ignore magic, even if it's staring them in the face… But the things our lot have taken to enchanting, you wouldn't believe."

After the shrinking door keys, Lestrade encountered regurgitating toilets, biting kettles, fire-breathing dinosaur toys, and cars cursed to malfunction in embarrassing ways. None of the cases needed more than the usual legwork to solve, but filing paperwork for the amputations, second-degree burns, automobile accidents that blocked three intersections and taking the victims to Robert so they could get their fingers and skin regrown *without* having their memories summarily erased put Lestrade in an extremely blood-thirsty mood. He almost felt relieved when Culverton tried to put a

hex on him after getting reprimanded for his peeping-tom activities.

Lestrade wasn't sure if it was his in-laws who did something to him or if it was the belt John gifted him around the time he started working with wizards that he happened to be wearing that day. But the hex bounced off a force-field that immediately surrounded Lestrade and hit Culverton square in the face. It was entirely unnecessary to use a Taser after that point, but he did. Just in case.

"That was a very impressive Shield Charm," Arthur said a bit too casually when he came to transport Culverton to a wizard hospital. "I thought you, um, didn't do any magic."

"No idea what you're talking about," said Lestrade gleefully. "I've never seen a real force-field outside a movie."

Arthur sighed. "Right. Now can you take a look at this? I'm pretty sure there's a befuddlement type of charm on this bobble-head, but I'm not sure what it's trying to do besides making me feel confused. All I know is that a Muggle jumped off a bridge because of it."

The bobble-head turned out to be critical in uncovering a very clever theft scheme targeting Muggles. The perp bewitched harmless looking trinkets and sent them to his potential victims. The trinkets then Confunded the victims to mail their personal bank information to the perp. Once he got the info, he erased their memory, removed the first trinket, and then left a *second* trinket that made them *not* report any suspicious banking activity. He siphoned hundreds of thousands of pounds this way. Cyber Crime was able to trace him as soon as Lestrade alerted them because, while the perp knew about online banking, he didn't know all his online activities could be recorded and traced.

"I hope he doesn't just get a warning for charming trinkets," Lestrade snarled when they arrested the bastard.

"Oh, trust me, he *won't*," said Arthur grimly. "We have a new Muggle Protection Act precisely for this kind of case: if a wizard or witch uses magic in a way that causes the loss of a Muggle's property, health, life or other intangibles protected by Muggle law, he or she will be prosecuted according to the applicable Muggle law."

"Good! You guys can charge him of involuntary man slaughter, fraud, theft and breaking and entering!"

Arthur looked very alert after he said that. "Could you document that for me?"

Lestrade wondered what would happen if he made up a couple of laws and exaggerated the penalties of existing ones as he sloppily put together a report. Arthur had confided to him though the new Muggle Protection Act was written and ratified in order to stop wizards and witches from exploiting Muggles in ways Magical Legislature didn't cover, it wasn't put into much use because the Ministry of Magic lacked the necessary legal knowledge.

So his days went, and before he knew it, it was mid-December.

"Hey, babe," Lestrade said as he brushed off the filthy raindrops that clung to his coat.

"Hi Greg," Ellen called out from kitchen. "We're having spicy sausages and roasted asparagus today. Oh, Julia called me about an hour ago. She's coming back home next Saturday."

Lestrade grinned happily as he opened the fridge for a beer. "Great. How was everyone else?"

"Rupert made his toy train move."

"So?"

"He wasn't touching it."

"… And?"

"It was flying."

Lestrade sat heavily in one of the chairs at the dinner table, cracked open a beer and took a long drink. One of the unfortunate side-effects of being a wizard was that your children more often than not ended up with your magic genes.

"I guess that means he's going to Hogwarts, too," Lestrade groaned.

"Yes. Just so you know, Martin keeps banishing his peas and I caught Jeremy chasing after Elise who was riding something called a toy broomstick."

Stupid magic genes. "Sorry, babe."

"Ummmm, why are you even apologising?"

After dinner, he and Ellen did what they always did before falling asleep: snuggling in bed, gossiping.

"I really don't mind, you know," said Ellen, poking at his nose.

"I know," Lestrade mumbled.

The first three weeks after Robert out-ed him as a wizard, the fact loomed over Lestrade like the proverbial sword of Damocles. Before long everyone who hadn't suspected it before started to guess the truth Lestrade was very determined to deny as long as he could. Ellen had learned it from Julia, and was two seconds away from confronting him about it when she was mercifully intercepted by his in-laws. Jacqueline advised her to give him space so they could talk about it when he was feeling less raw. She'd agreed to wait for a week.

She lasted a day. Lestrade was shocked she managed to hold it in that long.

Nevertheless he wasn't prepared when Ellen went nuclear. He stared frozen in fear as Ellen stumbled over to him, her eyes overflowing with tears and wailing incoherently: " *You* -three weeks- hiding something-I can't- *just tell me!* "

Four years of marriage told him when Ellen was in this state, giving her what she wanted was the only way out. The whole story tumbled out of his mouth at the same level of incoherence as she. After a lot of crying (from Ellen), a lot apologising (from Greg), and several sleepless nights of Talking About It, they both acknowledged the wizard thing was there to stay like the hideous Christmas jumper your grandmother gave you and left it at that. The policy of keeping the issue inside the closet from whence it came worked fine.

Usually. Mostly.

Unless…

"Why is Hogwarts so beautiful?" said Ellen wistfully. "J showed me the Holographic Map thingy today. It's like the most *perfect* enchanted castle. No wonder Julia loves it there. Martin, Rupert and Elise are going to love it too."

… Unless someone brought up Hogwarts.

It felt like someone was ripping his guts out, whenever Sherlock whipped out Harry's blasted map of Hogwarts to go over the latest on Sirius Black. As he stared at the miniature 3D images of the corridors, classrooms and staircases, he couldn't help but wonder what his childhood would've been like if only he hadn't lost his magic, and felt irrationally jealous of his own daughter for getting what he'd never have.

"You are so lucky, you can go there if you want to," said Ellen.

Lestrade had a moment of dumbfounded shock as he realised this was true. Then the cynicism born from thirty years of hard living and over twenty years at the Force reared its ugly head.

So what if he could go to Hogwarts? He was still on the wrong side of forty. He wasn't like his father-in-law, who had the grit to request distance education around the same age as him and had the brains to finish the whole curriculum in two years, shocking all his teachers. *He* barely scrapped through Secondary School and left as soon as he could after taking his O-levels. Besides, he wasn't sure he wanted to be part of a world who thought having magic meant they could do whatever they wanted to those who didn't.

But…

"I might have to go to court."

"You always have to go to court."

"Not normal court. Magic court."

" *Why* ?"

"Remember the bastard who enchanted people into telling him their bank logins and stole all their money? The wizards are going to charge him of breaking *our* laws."

Ellen perked up. "They need you to testify?"

"And tell them what laws he broke."

"You're not a barrister."

"This is the first time justice will be meted out according to the *victim* s' laws. The wizards just need someone to tell them what those laws are."

"Why can't they get a proper barrister?"

"None of the barristers are wizards."

"So they reach for the next best thing."

"A copper with good working knowledge of criminal law, who is incidentally a wizard, yeah," Lestrade sighed. "I don't know if I can do this."

Ellen looked at him intently.

"If you don't speak for the victims, who's going to make it right for them?"

Lestrade said nothing.

He kept his silence late into the night, long after Ellen fell asleep. His mind was too full of ambivalent thoughts to let him slumber.

When it came down to it, Lestrade didn't have any problems with magic. Magic was cool and very useful. The problem he had was with *wizards* . He didn't want to be a wizard and all that entailed: the robes and the wand and the twisted mindset that refused to understand anything that didn't involve magic. Just because he had magic didn't mean he had to embrace the magic culture too.

"Can you be a magic user and not a wizard?" he wondered out loud.

Harry greeted the very last weekend of the term with a deep sense of satisfaction that only came after an extraordinarily productive two months and a Hogsmeade trip to look forward to. He and his friends had almost finished copying all the floor plans and features of the Marauder's map to their Holographic Map, and with a bit of tinkering, they might even get the individual detection/alert charm to work before the holidays. The only thing that fell on the wayside was Quidditch practice. Harry didn't have a replacement broom yet, and Madam Pomfrey was breathing fire because she was convinced Harry would collapse if someone sneezed at him the wrong way. It was very difficult to participate under such circumstances, even when one didn't factor the chilly haze of rain that transformed into snow by December, Wood's manic energy that made him very unreasonable, and the school broom Harry rode at team practice, an ancient Shooting Star, which was very slow and jerky.

On the last Friday evening of the term, Harry, Ron, Neville, Hermione and Julia went to Music Chamber to discuss the last finishing touches they should add to the Holographic map. As soon as they opened the door, they heard a shout:

"Appa, *NO* !"

The five of them stood gaping as Miss Jackie seethed at the holographic image of Mr. Shin, who looked pained.

"Jacqueline…" started Mr. Shin.

His image abruptly vanished when Miss Jackie ended the call. Then she threw the phone into a corner and started sobbing loudly into her arm.

For the next five minutes or so they plastered themselves against the door, pretending to not exist because they'd never seen Miss Jackie this distraught, therefore was at lost what to do.

They only started moving very cautiously when Miss Jackie cries

reduced to a sniffle and she raised her head.

"Hi, Auntie Jack," said Julia quietly when they got close enough.

Miss Jackie looked at her miserably. It took a several dry swallows before she was able say anything.

"Hi Julia darling. Sorry, I'm a big baby today."

Harry tried to deduce what was up. He didn't have to look further than her arm, where there was giant, purple bruise that covered almost half of the length of her white forearm starting from the wrist.

"What in the world *!* ?" Hermione screeched.

"I met a reporter at Hogsmeade," said Miss Jackie, looking deeply shaken. "She wanted to interview me for the *Prophet* . I said no, but she wouldn't listen. She grabbed my arm and dragged me all the way to the Three Broomsticks. Luckily Hagrid was there; he managed to pry her off and escort me back to Hogwarts."

"That's assault, that is!" said Ron furiously. "You should report her!"

"I tried to, but Appa got a wind of it. He was about to go jopok on the reporter, so I stopped."

Harry had no idea what she was saying, but her uncharacteristic incoherence was highly alarming. His alarm only increased when he saw the fresh tears leak out of her eyes.

"I don't know how much longer I can do this," she said hopelessly. "The workload isn't getting any better and I can't find anyone suitable to hire."

"We can help more," said Hermione earnestly.

"Yeah, I even know how to use the Internet now," said Ron, crossing his fingers behind his back. "If you just changed the rules a bit-"

" *No* !" said Miss Jackie sharply. Then in a softer but equally firm voice, she said, "No. I'm not running a sweatshop. I won't hire anyone younger than thirteen, and anyone underage will not work

more than five hours a week. That's final."

"Oh, c'mon…"

"And I won't employ students who have average marks below Acceptable," said Miss Jackie, looking sternly at Ron. "Are you still getting serial Trolls?"

"No," said Ron quickly.

"Are you really?"

" *Yes* !"

"Good," said Miss Jackie. "If I hear you getting serial Trolls again, I'm giving you the sack. Are we clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Ron in a small voice.

They left the music chamber a few minutes later, after Miss Jackie asked if she could have some privacy as she wanted to apologize to Mr. Shin. They wouldn't have stood to stay much longer even if she didn't ask. It was painful to see Miss Jackie locked in a job she couldn't thrive in. If only she'd been allowed to quit earlier, when all the customers were just students, it might not have been too bad. But now she couldn't just quit because she was responsible for older customers who were more than capable of sending horrible curses over Owl Post, to say nothing of the Howlers they kept sending because the concept of a phone was so foreign to them, they kept using it the wrong way and thought it didn't work.

"Some year Miss Jackie's having, eh?" said Ron ruefully.

"Yeah, and no thanks to us," Julia sighed.

They couldn't possibly work on the map under such circumstances. So Harry, Neville, Ron, Hermione and Julia went to the library and discussed the MMN business instead.

"What we need," Hermione declared, "is someone the customers can contact, who can explain how to properly work the phone and fix them if need be."

"And we need him quick," said Ron grimly. "It's Christmas season and I reckon there's going to be huge influx of new customers."

"We should lower the bar to the bare minimum," said Harry. "If the candidate can properly turn on a computer, that's good enough."

"How about giving them a test?" said Julia. "We can setup a computer in the Three Broomsticks or wherever the interview is going to happen, make each applicant go into the room alone and make them to do simple tasks like 'turn on the computer', 'play a music CD' and 'query so-and-so in any search engine of your choice.'"

"Yeah, that sounds good. Make them do stuff you can do in five minutes or less as long as you know what a computer is. That way we won't waste our time with people who don't know a thing about Muggles…"

They managed to narrow down the test to eight questions:

---

1. turn on the computer

2. open an internet browser

3. query the term 'mobile' on a search engine of your choice

4. open a web page in the Favourites

5. put a CD into the CD player

6. plug earphones to the jack

7. play the music CD that you have put in

8. open a text editor and type up the following paragraph. Then print the page

---

"Should we add two more and make it a nice ten?" Hermione

wondered.

"Why should we? This is good enough," said Ron.

They handed over the questions to Miss Jackie later that evening, and explained what they were for. She looked both amused and depressed as she read them.

"I think we can remove the questions related to CDs," she said. "Otherwise good job. I think this covers the basics."

"How do you want to word the ad?" asked Hermione.

"Whatever you like. Just don't make the position sound too interesting. I don't want to filter through hundreds of people like last time."

The ad they eventually sent to the *Prophet* was worded like this:

The Magical Mobile Network Job Opening

Position: Customer Service Representative

All witches and wizards above age seventeen are eligible

Will train necessary skills, but expect Muggle knowledge test

Apply in person on December 21st, at ten o' clock

Inquire Ms. Jacqueline Shin at the Three Broomsticks, Hogsmeade

DO NOT CONTACT BY OWL OR MOBILE OR FLOO

"Thanks, doc, appreciate your work," said Lestrade.

Robert nodded vaguely as he rearranged Jane Kelly's internal organs and closed the Y-incision with a whispered spell. The cut flesh knitted back together in a minute, leaving only faint traces where he'd used the scalpel.

"Anything else you need?" Robert asked he covered Jane's remains

in a shroud.

"Got more than enough to go on," said Lestrade. "Just need to find the bastards who did this."

Robert spared Lestrade a glance.

"You want to make it right for them."

"Well, yeah," Lestrade growled.

Robert's lips twitched into a ghost of a smile, "You're a good man, Inspector."

Lestrade was about to reply, only to realise Robert wasn't there anymore. He pondered this conundrum for a couple of seconds before checking the door.

John Watson looked back at him, looking deeply apologetic.

"Sorry, I didn't know he was here," said John.

Lestrade sighed. Some of the madder things Robert did spawned from his determination to *not* be in the same room as John if Sherlock was not present also, and even then only if John kept a respectable distance of two meters. He once launched himself out of a window from the second floor when John cornered him and covered all exits. But as long as both conditions were met, Robert had no problem interacting with John, though he did inject the phrase "Go love your husband," quite a few times. Sherlock was as baffled at his behaviour as everyone else.

"So why are *you* here?" asked Lestrade.

"Himself wanted to check out the Embalmer victims."

"Of course he did. Now hold a bit," Lestrade glared at Culverton on the other side of the glass. " *Oi*, all eyeballs forward!"

Culverton's magical glass eye swivelled back into proper position.

"I'm having a lot of trouble with him," Lestrade growled.

"I heard," John sighed. "I better go. Robert will never show up as long as I'm here and heaven knows what Sherlock is doing to the poor girls."

John went back out to the hallway. Much to Lestrade's annoyance, Culverton's magical eye followed John's trek.

Robert reappeared inside the morgue shortly after John left. He finished cleaning up Jane's body and prepared it for transport as if he hadn't vanish for a moment, chilling the body with another whispered spell and a gentle, almost loving caress down the shrouded body.

"I can't help but notice you don't use wands," said Lestrade.

"I was raised in a sect that didn't believe in letting one's magic depend on tools," said Robert.

"Makes sense."

"It doesn't. You can only do rough and crude spells without a focusing tool."

Lestrade snorted. "Why keep at it then?"

"Why use an enchanted, self-inking quill when a pencil is just fine? Why use fire spells when a lighter is more reliable?"

"True enough," said Lestrade, grinning. "Say, doc, can you-"

But Robert was already leaving the morgue. Lestrade followed after him into the hall, where Smith and Culverton was staring at his rapidly retreating back.

"I can't believe he can cut open a woman's body like it was a slab of meat," said Smith, shivering.

Lestrade sighed. Not this again. "I've never seen anyone treat the dead with so much respect."

"Are you sure *he* isn't the Embalmer?" hissed Culverton behind his hand.

Lestrade groaned. "Autopsies are standard procedure and all Muggle healers learn how to do it at medical school."

Both Culverton and Smith looked thoroughly disgusted.

"Don't you people have something like a sickle-test spell?" Smith demanded.

"No idea what you're talking about."

Culverton sneered. "I *knew* Muggle medicine wasn't worth anything."

Lestrade felt his temper rising. "Yeah, tell that to the last small pox victim."

"Robert Ju's reputation as a healer is *clearly* overblown," Culverton went on as if Lestrade wasn't there. "If he's as good as everyone *says* he is he wouldn't be dabbling in Muggle medicine rubbish."

"I'll take you seriously when you stop thinking medieval and backwards," Lestrade said loudly. "You two were completely out of line. I'm reporting this to Kingsley."

Culverton went red and Smith started to bluster, "Now see here-"

"No, you see here," growled Lestrade. "If you got a problem, go ahead. Try me."

As expected, Culverton and Smith didn't dare.

Lestrade returned to the station after leaving Culverton and Smith to transport the bodies back to the Ministry of Magic. Superintendent Chambers called him to his office shortly after he arrived.

"What have you got on the Embalmer?" Chambers demanded as soon as Lestrade stepped inside.

Lestrade rattled off how they'd found the same Potion ingredients in all the victims, including the ones the 'Home Office people' brought in. The killer, therefore, was the person who bought this obscure combination of substances. Because the substances were so esoteric, once they identified the seller, they should be able to find

the culprit.

"Good, so we have a lead," said Chambers, as he scowled at his report. "I see you've referenced Ju here."

"He gathered all the evidence," said Lestrade, frowning at Chambers' tone. "What's wrong about it?"

"Remove it."

"Why?"

"We don't need the association," said Chambers tersely. "The case is controversial enough without his reputation hurting our chances of convicting the killer."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you *know* ?" said Chambers patronizingly. "Robert Ju is notorious in the states for dabbling in 'alternative medicine', and I don't mean natural herbal remedies. He would've been ostracized from the American medical community long ago if he wasn't such a good surgeon."

"But-"

"Just say we found the potion ingredients during the routine autopsy," Chambers interrupted. "Don't worry about Ju raising a fuss. He can't afford to associate himself with voodoo medicine anymore. I heard Johns Hopkins is keen to get rid of him-just one hint of a scandal and he's out."

Lestrade was aghast. He was certain the voodoo medicine Chambers was talking about was magic. Apparently Robert didn't withhold magical healing from his Muggle patients even when wizards weren't directly involved in their hurts. That he was scorned and persecuted for it was galling.

Almost against his will, Lestrade remembered Culverton's sneering jibes against 'muggle medicine'. It made him wonder if the wizards ridiculed Robert for using backwards non-magic medical practices.

"On a brighter note, the Home Office was very impressed at how you're handling the Embalmer case," said Chambers.

"Really?" said Lestrade sceptically.

Chambers nodded. "Much preferred working with you than with Morton."

Lestrade refrained from rolling his eyes. If he, like DI Morton, was 100% Muggle, he'd have troubling working with wizards too. Lestrade darkly wondered how many times Smith obliviated the poor sod before Kingsley intervened.

Lestrade left Chambers' office feeling deeply ambivalent about the heavy hints of a future promotion. After slogging through some paperwork, he drove to the Leaky Cauldron where Robert was renting a room ("cheaper, better accommodations and food is included.") He started looking around as soon as he entered the pub, walking slowly towards the bar and surveying the diners.

"Go home and love your wife, Inspector," said a voice behind him.

Lestrade swore as he turned around. Robert was standing right behind him, wearing a shirt that had a rose-white-black pattern that might've worked on an accent pillow adorning a black futon, but never a man's body, especially when said man was wearing jogging bottoms the most blinding ton of blue and a rainbow cardigan.

"I would've just called if you had a phone," said Lestrade, opting to hide his unease by acting overly indignant.

"I'll get one when they stop blowing up on me," Robert replied.

"Yeah, you do that. I recommend the new MMN phones. Now listen," Lestrade dropped his voice. "The Super wants me to remove all references of you in my report. You okay with that?"

"Why shouldn't I be okay?" asked Robert curiously.

"You worked over a hundred hours to collect evidence for us! Don't you want *some* credit?"

"No," said Robert, frowning at Lestrade like he was talking nonsense. "It would hurt your court case."

Lestrade exhaled loudly through his nose. "Please don't tell me you advised my Super to leave you out."

"Of course I did," said Robert, still frowning. "You would've found out my reputation sooner or later. Isn't it better for you to know it now before the defence attorney uses it against you?"

Lestrade sighed deeply through his mouth. When John warned him Robert was prone to shooting himself professionally on the foot, she wasn't joking.

"You're having dark, malicious thoughts," said Robert, far too accurately.

"And you're being creepy again," Lestrade retorted. "So what are you up to?"

"Packing."

Lestrade started. "You're going back to the States?"

"Maybe. I don't know," Robert stared at the ceiling. "I was planning to go on a sabbatical after the guest surgeon gig."

"And it's done?"

"It's been done for a while. I just wanted to take care of Lizzie, Mary and Jane before I left."

"How long of a while?"

"Twenty days," Robert tilted his head sideways. "Don't worry, I can afford the room and board."

Lestrade wondered how Robert knew he worried about that. "Where are you going? What are your plans?"

"Maybe swing by Scotland," said Robert, shrugging. "There is a tourist trap called Hogsmeade there. I might as well act tourist."

Final Notes : This chapter was the most painful thing to write. So much I wanted to cover, so much didn't work out. Argh!

The Glitch

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Seven: The Glitch

Without a doubt, the interview process screening the applicants for the first advertised position in the Magical Mobile Network was one of the most singular events Remus had experienced for some time.

Remus had heard about the advertisement for help through the staffroom grapevine. He didn't think much of it beyond wishing Jacqueline the best of luck as she was going to need a lot of it. Flitwick and McGonagall were hinting heavily that she would need an escort lest another reporter have the gall to try and force an interview again, and Burbage and Sprout were looking at him rather pointedly as they spoke. Remus had a feeling he made a narrow escape when Hagrid told the teachers Jacqueline asked if he could act as escort for she was afraid to go by herself.

Then for reasons Remus wasn't sure he wanted to know, Hagrid asked Remus if he could come along too-looking very shifty and furtive as he did so. He agreed since he owed Jacqueline a lot of help. He realized Hagrid had taken the liberty of asking his help without consulting Jacqueline first when her face formed a puzzled look when she noticed him trotting after the gamekeeper, which turned into a little frown when Hagrid tried (and failed) to make excuses. Then she shrugged and the three of them headed to

Hogsmeade.

Remus hoped to never see such a sight as that again. From north, south, east, and west every witch and wizard who was of age had tramped into Hogsmeade to answer the advertisement or so it seemed. The streets outside the Three Broomsticks were chocked with witches and wizards, and if they formed a queue, it would've wrapped around both the pub and the neighbouring establishments four times. Remus wouldn't have even dreamed so many people could be brought together by a single advertisement. Many of them were talking animatedly amongst each other as they fidgeted their best robes, more were arguing their merits, and some were poring over their old Muggle Studies textbooks for last minute prep. When she saw how many were waiting, Jacqueline let out a tiny noise of despair. Nevertheless she squared her shoulders and held up the magical megaphone to her lips.

"May I have your attention, please?"

The crowd turned to look at Jacqueline. Several of them started at the sight of her. She certainly didn't look like someone who created the most significant invention of the decade, or so sayeth the *Prophet* . Clad in a black ribbed turtleneck shirt, dark charcoal slacks, black boots and a jet-black wool coat, she looked more like a Muggle woman plumbing the depths of deep mourning than anyone remotely magical.

"Hello, everyone; thank you so much for turning up despite the cold weather," said Jacqueline in a clear voice. "As you may have gathered, my name is Jacqueline Shin. I shall begin the interview process shortly, starting with the Muggle knowledge test. Mr. Hagrid here will set up the booths where you will be asked to answer five questions. The test will be administered on first-come-first-serve basis. You will have two minutes to complete the test. Please keep in mind I am not looking for the number of questions you get correctly, but how you approach the questions. Those who show promise will continue on the second round of interviews. Do you have any questions?"

Someone raised their hand up. "What if we finish the test in less than a minute?"

"That would be noted in the marking, that much I can tell you."

"Does it matter if we tell others about the test?" someone else asked.

Jacqueline smiled crookedly. "I will let you decide whether it is beneficial for you to spread that knowledge to others when I am only selecting one person today."

A murmur spread throughout the crowd. Once she confirmed there were no more questions, Jacqueline walked closely behind Hagrid as he entered the Three Broomsticks, shoving the crowd back easily with his bulk. Remus followed closely after both of them.

The first thing he noticed was that the pub was clear of customers and the customary tables and chairs.

"Thank you, Rosmerta," said Jacqueline to the pretty and curvy woman who brought fond memories of Remus' teenage years. "I'll try to finish this as soon as possible."

"Oh, take your time," said Madam Rosmerta, beaming. "I had very brisk business with your applicants while they were waiting. I dare say they'll stay afterwards for a pint!"

For consolation if nothing else, Remus didn't say as Jacqueline smiled crookedly again.

Hagrid and Remus quickly raised up four screened booths similar to the ones in the Music Chamber. Jacqueline pulled out four sets of rickety desks and chairs from her shoulder bag, and Remus set them up inside the booths. While he was at it, Hagrid pulled out a pearly-white windmill from the shoulder bag and set it on its feet.

"Is that…?" said Madam Rosmerta, pointing at the windmill.

Jacqueline looked at her. "What do you think it is?"

"I heard a rumour that Hogwarts now can make Muggle artefacts work," admitted Madam Rosmerta.

"Did you tell everyone in the pub, Hagrid?" asked Jacqueline

wearily.

"Did you really make it?" whispered Madam Rosmerta. "I thought Muggle things didn't work around Magic."

"Professor Dumbledore discovered a way to work around it," demurred Jacqueline, "I just applied the principle to this generator. Now then…"

Jacqueline pulled out the last five pieces of equipment from the bag: four rectangular objects bearing the shape of a textbook of varying sizes and thickness with a long cord attached to one of the four thinner sides, and something Jacqueline called an extension cord. Three of the cords she connected to the extension cord, which in turn was connected to the windmill's outlet.

"Okay, all set," said Jacqueline, "Remus, could you bring them in four at a time?"

Remus nodded and stuck his head outside the door.

"We're ready! Please form a queue!"

There was a noisy scuffle as the witches and wizards fought to get to the front of the queue. Remus heard Jacqueline order a round of hot butterbeer to serve to the applicants waiting outside. Madam Rosmerta was more than happy to go outside with a tray.

The first set of four applicants entered the pub-along with a dozen or so others who pushed themselves inside. The people outside plastered themselves against the windows to watch the proceedings. Jacqueline drew in a deep breath, multiplied herself to four and personally guided the gaping and squawking applicants to the booths.

The test proceeded quickly. The majority of applicants left their booth shortly after the allotted two minutes looking ashen and dejected. The question they raised spread panic among the untested applicants: "Did you have *any* idea what the questions were asking?"

About half-way through, unable to help himself, Remus peered into

one of the booths to see what was going on.

A wizard in scarlet robes was circling around a black rectangular artefact, poking at it with his wand and muttering under his breath. Beads of sweat clung to his forehead as he shot panicked glances at Jacqueline, who watched him with a clipboard in the one hand, a pen in the other, and a sombre expression on her face. A few seconds later the timer dinged, and the wizard shuffled out of the booth with his head bowed and shoulders slumped.

Remus checked the other booths. The witch inside the second booth was crouching on the floor, bending the black cord connecting the mysterious artefact to the extension cord between her hands with a baffled expression on her face. The witch in the neighbouring booth exclaimed in triumph after discovering the artefact was made of two connecting pieces and could be opened like a book. The wizard inside the fourth booth merely stared at the black artefact like he was expecting it to leap off the desk and bite him.

The crowd quickly thinned out as time passed. Some of the applicants, unable to handle the escalating tension and growing number of apparent failures, left before they could take the test, while a good number of the tested applicants left without bothering to find out how they fared. A half a dozen stayed wearing smug looks, as though they knew something the others didn't.

Soon there were only three untested applicants. Remus noticed a wizard who, unlike the others, was dressed like a Muggle; instead of robes and a cloak, he was wearing a purple pinstripe suit jacket, similarly pinstriped trousers of a different tone of purple, a green overcoat, and orange accented trainers. Remus thought donning Muggle clothing for a Muggle knowledge exam was a rather nice touch, but when Jacqueline looked at him, her right eye twitched.

"Your name, please?" she asked.

"Robert," said the wizard, blinking slowly. "Robert… Dong."

Jacqueline scribbled that down. "The sheet on the desk has all five questions. Please tell me when you're ready."

"I'm ready," said Robert, staring at the desk.

Jacqueline set the timer. "Go."

Robert sat at the desk and scanned the questions. He frowned for a moment, looked at Jacqueline questioningly, and then returned his glance to the desk. He then flipped the upper half of the artefact up and looked around the sides of the lower half. He pressed a button on the side, which glowed green momentarily. The black screen on the propped up part of the artefact showed a picture of a rectangle with a cap on the right that was crossed through diagonally. Robert checked the back of the artefact where the long cord was attached. Then he looked up at Jacqueline.

"Is the windmill the power source?"

"Yes," said Jacqueline, smiling.

"May I leave the booth?"

"Sure."

Robert left the booth. He connected the cord attached to the artefact to the extension cord and then returned to the booth. He pressed the side button again, and this time the screen changed to show a picture that had four different coloured panels arranged to form a wavy-sort of square and the words 'Windows 7' written underneath it. After a few seconds, the screen changed to show a frozen photograph of a grassy hill under a blue sky. Robert ran his finger on the small square area on the artefact's lower piece, which had many buttons bearing different alphanumerical character labels. Suddenly a white box appeared on the screen on top of the scenery photograph. Robert laboriously pecked on the labelled buttons using two fingers and the corresponding letters appeared inside the narrow bar inside the white box. The white box showed a new picture that bore the word 'Google' after he pressed a button on the right.

"Time's up," said Jacqueline as Robert started pecking buttons again. "Please wait outside, I'll get back shortly."

Robert left the booth again after a short bow. Once he left the premises, Jacqueline stepped over to the window, and shouted through the megaphone that the tests were over and called out the names of the people she selected for the second round of interviews. A groan of disappointment came from outside, and everyone trooped away in different directions, until there was not a person in sight except the six wizards and witches whose names were called out, which unsurprisingly included Robert.

"I'll be meeting everyone one at a time," said Jacqueline. "I don't know how long each interview will last, so please be patient and enjoy the refreshments Rosmerta will provide for you. Remus, Hagrid, if you can please…?"

Remus helped Jacqueline move the screens to a corner to create a private nook in the pub area. Hagrid put down the windmill and shoved it and all the other equipment back into the shoulder bag. The six interviewees waited whilst displaying varying degrees of twitchiness as they did so.

At last they were ready for the interviews. Remus and Hagrid squeezed themselves inside the newly created booth per Jacqueline's request.

Jacqueline asked fairly generic interview questions, like what were their strengths and weakness and what they had to offer for the position. Four of them mentioned the number of OWLs and NEWTs they had achieved, two of them reiterated their Muggle technology competency, and one went on at length how he was willing to leave a very lucrative position at Gringotts Bank for the opportunity to work for the greatest magical innovation of the century. Jacqueline nodded politely as she noted all of their past accomplishments and calmly deflected the persistent question of how much they would work on the network by replying they will know should they get hired. After dismissing the Gringotts Bank employee, she called in the last candidate:

"Robert Dong."

Robert stepped inside the booth. There was a bit of butterbeer froth stuck on the corner of his mouth.

"Please take a seat," said Jacqueline formally. "You're American?"

"Yes," said Robert, sitting down and rather belatedly wiping the foam away. "Will that be a problem?"

"As long as you are affiliated with the International Confederation of Wizards, you are fine."

"I'm okay, I think," Robert said, scratching his neck. "I graduated from Salem Institute of Magic."

Jacqueline smiled as she noted that. "So tell me about your strengths and weaknesses."

"Well, there are a lot of ways to answer that question," Robert replied. "But can you first tell me more about the position and what kind of candidate you are looking for? That way I can give you the relevant details."

Remus started to pay more attention; Robert was the first interviewee who asked about the position itself.

"I'm looking for a customer service representative," said Jacqueline. "The primary duty is answering any customer inquiries related to the Magical Mobile phones and resolve any issues they raise. Secondary duties include account checkups and monitoring incoming Owls. I'm looking for a candidate who can fulfil these duties, is calm under pressure, can work with young students, is able and willing to learn, and competent in Defence Against the Dark Arts and Muggle Technology."

"Why those two areas?"

"My customers are known to send creative curses besides the usual Howlers when they Owl their complaints. I also use computers for my business operations."

Robert nodded as he scribbled it down on a tiny spring notepad that bore the brand CVS.

Jacqueline twinkled. "So what strengths can you bring to this position, Robert?" she asked.

Robert told her about his previous work experiences in the States. He'd worked primarily in Health Care, thus he had a lot experience in dealing with people who were cranky, miserable and angry (and in pain) and often unable to properly articulate why they were so. He also had a lot experience dealing with Owls bearing complaints, as witch and wizard patients, unlike their Muggle counterparts, didn't have the option of suing clinics/hospitals for malpractice thus had to take matters in their own hands (preferably not with .44 magnum rifles, whatever that was). Jacqueline chuckled when Robert told her during his earlier days as an apprentice he felt more like a bomb technician than a wizard. He'd also done rounds in paediatrics and had volunteered for youth-oriented non-profit organizations such as 'Little Lights' and 'Covenant House', thus knew what to expect when working with kids.

"What made you consider a career change?" Jacqueline asked.

Robert sighed. "I know I'm meant for service-oriented jobs, but after working sixteen years in the medical field, I've started to wonder if I would be more effective elsewhere."

"How do you know you're meant for service-oriented jobs?"

"I derive my great joy when I help someone," said Robert wryly. "My greatest difficulty is saying no when I can see a venue in which I can provide help. I've learned to set clear boundaries and never cross them to overcome this tendency."

"Would say your service-oriented personality is both your greatest strength and greatest weakness?"

"Yes."

Jacqueline made a thoughtful noise. "What will you do if you discover Customer Service is not right for you?"

"I will first discuss the matter with my manager, and if no alternative arrangements can be found, I will remain until my replacement is properly trained to handle the vacancy." Robert paused. "I should mention I don't make changes lightly and I believe suffering produces character."

Jacqueline smiled.

The interview moved onto the subject of salaries and relocation. The figure Jacqueline offered as a baseline made Remus wonder if he should apply for the position if his teaching career didn't pan out and Robert told her he had already settled in Hogsmeade and would have no trouble commuting to Dervish and Banges where he'd do most of his customer-facing work-should he be hired.

"Do you have any questions for me?" asked Jacqueline.

"What is the dress code?" asked Robert.

"Business-causal for customer facing duties; casual otherwise."

"How would you define Business-causal?"

"When in doubt, stick to boots and robes. Any other questions?"

"Just one: Did I get the job?" asked Robert, beaming lopsidedly.

"I can't tell you that," said Jacqueline serenely. "If that is all, then thank you, Robert. You were very informative."

They shook hands. Jacqueline dismissed all the straggling candidates after telling them she'd Owl them her decision by this evening.

"So what do you think?" she asked Remus and Hagrid as they sat at the bar while the usual customers started to fill the Three Broomsticks.

"I like Robert," said Hagrid immediately.

"He sounded the most suitable and competent," Remus agreed.

"He does bring the most relevant experience and I like his work ethic," said Jacqueline pensively.

"I'm sensing a 'but' here," Remus probed.

Jacqueline crunched her face.

"Maybe it's because he's American, but I can't tell if he's Muggle-born, Muggle-raised, or a Magic-raised wizard who happens to know a lot about Muggles," she said. "He kept mixing Muggle terms and Wizard terms when he spoke. And did you notice he never mentioned *what* exactly he did in the medical field?"

Remus hadn't. "Now that you mention it…"

"Plus, who in their right mind mix and matches *suits* and wears accented *basketball shoes* to a job interview?" Jacqueline went on, scowling. "Stripes and more stripes and then even *more* stripes… good heavens, doesn't he realise stripes upon stripes doesn't count as *matching* when each set of stripes are completely and totally different from one another, *especially* suits?"

Remus and Hagrid stared. It was the first time they'd seen Jacqueline noticeably *bothered* by something, especially over something trivial.

"Is *that* wha' bothered yeh the most? His *clothes* ?" asked Hagrid incredulously.

"It's my *pet-peeve*," said Jacqueline with feeling. Then she deflated. "I know. It's very shallow. I just… *okay* . His highly questionable fashion sense aside, Robert is the most suitable for the job, agreed?"

"Agreed," said Remus and Hagrid.

"Okay," Jacqueline stood up. "I'm heading back. Are you two going to stay longer? Yes? Alright then, Bye."

"Oh, Jack… !" Hagrid was starting to say.

But he was too late. Jacqueline already vanished inside the teeming crowd.

Hundreds of miles away from Hogsmeade, Detective Inspector Lestrade had arrived at 221B Baker Street to pick up Sherlock and John prior to heading to King's Cross to pick up their kids, who were

returning home for Christmas. Sherlock gave Lestrade the customary once-over and sniffed haughtily.

"So you've finally reached a resolution to your Magic-identity crisis. Good. It was getting *tedious* ."

"Well good morning to you too," Lestrade snapped.

"Morning. How do you figure, Sherlock?" said John.

"Lestrade always carries himself in pseudo-military fashion when he's about his face his father-in-law. For what reason would he visit his father-in-law? Not to drop off his children, the timing is ludicrous. Could be for holiday preparations, but not when he's about to pick up his daughter, unless she would derive some benefit from the visit. The only option that covers both venues is the thorny issue of Lestrade's magic."

Lestrade rolled his eyes, "All that just from my Tell, yeah?"

"So you're embracing your inner-wizard?" asked John.

"Who said anything about wizards?" Lestrade growled. "Just because I have magic doesn't mean I have to go to the deep end."

"Oh, I see, your FIL has magic, but no one would call him a wizard, not in the fullest sense, and you'd rather do without the robes and wands," said John, nodding.

"I like his style and way of life better," Lestrade agreed.

"Pointless fine distinctions," Sherlock scorned.

"Oh, shut up," John and Lestrade retorted.

On their way to King's Cross, the three of them talked about Sirius Black (as usual).

"Harry mentioned a rather interesting glitch in the Marauder's Map," said Sherlock as he wriggled in his seat. "He didn't think much about it until he replicated the glitch without meaning to as he was updating *his* map. Your daughter rightfully pointed out if the so-

called glitch is *replicable,* it means the glitch is not a mistake limited to the Marauder's map and must have a deeper, underlying cause."

"What kind of glitch is it?"

"The Weasley twins called it the Pettigrew Glitch," said John. "Ever since they'd found the map, they noticed a dot labelled 'Peter Pettigrew' would sometimes show up. But when they check the room he's supposed to be in, there's no one by that name."

"Not even a ghost?"

"The Hogwarts ghosts insist Peter Pettigrew isn't one."

"What's the big deal?"

"According to your father-in-law, *Peter Pettigrew* was the wizard who tracked down Sirius Black after LV's fall and got blown up for his troubles twelve years ago."

"So?"

"If the *Peter Pettigrew* two enchanted maps insist he exists and yet the Hogwarts Ghosts declare is not among the lingering dead is the same *Peter Pettigrew* who tracked down Sirius Black, then the report of Pettigrew's death may have been highly exaggerated."

Lestrade almost crashed his car into a lorry.

He only started shouting after he semi-illegally parked his car next to a strip of pavement.

"ALRIGHT, YOU PRATS: YOU TWO ARE NOT ALLOWED TO DROP BOMBSHELLS LIKE THAT ON ME WHILE I'M DRIVING, AM I CLEAR *!* ?"

"Crystal," said John.

" *Dull*," Sherlock huffed.

Lestrade huffed back.

" *Fine* . I hereby uninvite you to my family dinner. Did I mention the Minister of Magic is stopping by for port?"

What happened inside Lestrade's car after this is better left unsaid. Suffice to say, Harry and Julia had no idea what happened when they arrived at platform 9 and ¾, but they did note Lestrade was calling John cutie-pie, John referred to Sherlock as Snookums, and Sherlock christened Lestrade 'darling-wizard' and John 'my dear, Hailey'.

"Are you okay about being a wizard, now?" Julia asked her father with trepidation after Sherlock used his new endearment for Lestrade.

"I'm good," said Lestrade, wrapping an arm around her shoulders in an assuring way. "Don't think I'll start wearing robes, though. Not enough money in Gringotts."

Julia giggled as she clung to his midriff. "Grandpa doesn't like robes either. He thinks they're *stupid* ."

Lestrade grinned. "I always knew he was a very wise man."

The seating arrangements changed once Julia and Harry entered the picture. Julia claimed the front passenger seat, citing Lestrade's declaration that the seat was *hers* . After folding Sherlock into the back, John asked the kids about their term.

Harry had a lot to say about his new classes, particularly Care of Magical Creatures. Apparently the volatile combination of Hagrid- whose idea of 'Interesting Creatures' composed of 'Horrible Monsters' such as three-headed dogs, dragons and six feet tall spiders- and Professor Kettleburn- who amassed sixty-two periods of probation during his teaching career at Hogwarts and was forced to take life at a quieter pace with only one and a half of his original limbs remaining to him- spawned some very interesting lesson plans. Harry's class had already travelled the Forbidden Forest twice, and they were yet to study a creature that had a Ministry of Magic rating below XXX. The only lesson no one got injured in was the enjoyable one involving Salamanders. Harry and Hermione had taken to charming long-sleeved shirts for themselves and their

friends for Care of Magical Creatures class. The shirt's magical armouring and shielding properties allowed them to deflect heavy blows from Hippogriffs and other such beasts with nothing but a noisy ' *Clang* ' to note the incident.

"… Don't take that class next year, sweetheart," Lestrade concluded when Harry finished speaking.

"But they got to see unicorns in the forest," Julia protested.

"Sunshine-"

" *Unicorns* !"

Lestrade slumped. "Is that armouring spell easy to learn?"

"It's not that bad," said Harry. "Once we figure out how to make it longer-lasting, Ron's going to start selling the shirts."

Julia reported she *finally* caught up to her classmates in Charms and Transfigurations, though she wasn't convinced she could make a pineapple dance across a table more than seven out of ten times. Harry noted he stopped getting bottom points for Potions, but he was not optimistic he would see the same kind of improvement in his Study of Ancient Runes class, which turned out to be a terrible mistake. Try as Harry might, he still remained at the 'staring-blankly' stage of the translation ability scale.

"What about Muggle Studies?" John asked.

"It's really easy and boring unless Miss Jackie teaches it," Harry groaned. "Burbage spends half of the lecture going on and on why the only difference between a Witch and a Muggle is magic, as if we don't know that already."

"Some lessons are worth repeating. What about Jack?"

"Miss Jackie does *science experiments.* Like, last month she did a silver tarnish removal comparison."

"Come again?" Lestrade asked, confused, while Sherlock's eyes gleamed.

"She was explaining chemistry and showed us why Muggles might find better solutions because of it," Harry said. "Silver tarnish removal was one example. Mrs. Skower's All-Purpose Magical Mess Remover did a little better than regular silver polish and it took the same amount of time and effort. But when she lined a pot with aluminium foil, filled it with boiling water, dumped a tablespoon of baking soda and a teaspoon of salt into the water and then put silverware on top of the foil, the silverware came out completely tarnish free in a few minutes. It was awesome."

"Basic chemistry," said Sherlock, nodding. "Silver tarnish is *silver sulphide* . Many metals in addition to silver form compounds with sulphur. Some of them have a greater affinity for sulphur than silver does. Aluminium is such a metal. The silver sulphide reacts with aluminium in the charged solution of salt and sodium bicarbonate. Thus the sulphur atoms transfer from silver to aluminium, freeing the silver metal and forming aluminium sulphide."

Harry eyes went slightly glazed. "I think she said something like that. Anyway, it was cool."

The talk shifted to the Magic Mobile Network and Jack's constant uphill battle to find suitable employees. At which point Sherlock got bored of the gossip and told them to shut up, he needed to think. Lestrade retaliated by loudly announcing to Julia that she was going to a have a new baby brother, Joseph/Simon/Eli.

" *When* ?" Julia squealed.

"Next year around August or September," said Lestrade.

"You're breeding like rabbits," Sherlock spat.

"Yes, thank you."

Lestrade and Julia continued to talk animatedly about baby Micah/ Lucas/Vincent. They therefore weren't paying attention to the backseat passengers when Harry directed at John a hopeful-cum-inquiring look, which quickly vanished when John shook her head sadly.

" *If you can turn your puny little minds to the more important issue at hand*," Sherlock hissed between his teeth. "It's *imperative* we gain more information on Black. Lestrade, is the Minister of Magic's attendance an absolute yes?"

"More or less," said Lestrade, glancing back. "But how are you going to invite yourself to a magic discussion? I can't even bring Ellen because she's Muggle."

Sherlock placed a hand on Harry's shoulder.

"You forget who my son is."

"Is this really necessary?" Harry complained as John tamed his hair with a comb and liberal amounts of product.

John nodded. "Just imagine we're going undercover."

Harry pulled a face as he inspected himself in front of the mirror. He didn't recognise himself. His hair was slicked back, his cobalt-blue jumper was made of cashmere, the trousers were black and tailored to fit, and the pale azure shirt he wore underneath his jumper was so outrageously expensive, he felt phantom hives just thinking about it. After sticking his tongue at his reflection and highly polished shoes, Harry turned to Sherlock and John.

Sherlock looked no different than usual, wearing a black Bespoke suit sans tie, though Harry did note he'd chosen the purple shirt that had a curious effect on women above the age of twelve. John caused the most perturbation; his reaction to seeing John in disguise back when he was a first year didn't hold a candle against that of seeing the very elegant… *person*… John transformed into after doing something to her hair and face and wearing a beautifully cut indigo dress with a deep V-neckline, pretty black heels and diamond white gold jewellry.

"Ready?" John asked to Sherlock and Harry after they all wore their winter coats.

"Ready," said Harry apprehensively.

"Yes," said Sherlock, nodding.

They took a cab to Mr. Shin's house. The cabbie asked them if they were going to a fancy gala. Mr. Lestrade opened the door for them when they rang the bell. He took one look at John and blurted: "*Who the hell are you* ?"

"His wife," said John, pointing at Sherlock. "Now let us in, it's freezing out here."

Mr. Lestrade stepped aside, staring bug-eyed and gaping.

For one stupid second, Harry thought he'd entered the wrong house. The small, tiled entryway was gone and instead of the plain hardwood floor that was a step above it, a large and luxurious parlour furnished with fine cherry wood framed glass cabinets, tables and chairs with white Victorian-style upholstery was just beyond the foyer. Harry was certain the house was not three-stories tall, but the crystal chandelier on the ceiling had to be at least that high above. A ten foot Christmas tree stood proud and tall in the living room, and one could barely see the needle leaves under the fairy lights, white and silver ribbons, crystal chains and other such decorations.

"Looks like Jeremy had fun," John said, looking around.

"That's one way of putting it," Mr. Lestrade grumbled, looking deeply uncomfortable in his grey suit.

"Interesting," Sherlock muttered. "The walls were extended upwards and the entire floor was rotated 180 degrees without changing the outside structure. Obvious. But how was this done…?"

Mr. Shin entered the parlour from a different entrance a few minutes later. Mr. Shin was always a dapper dresser, but he looked more so today in his navy three-piece suit, black tie, starched white shirt and gold pocket watch attached to a gold chain. Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, but Mr. Shin looked taller.

"I wish you asked someone who is more adapt at this sort of thing," Mr. Shin grumbled. "Do not be surprised if I make a complete

debacle out of it."

"You'll be fine, Dad," said Mr. Jason, poking his head out from the kitchen. He had exchanged his raggy T-shirt, cargos and stained black apron for a white chef's coat and hat and long black trousers in deference to the occasion.

"Yeah, just act like you normally act and Fudge will be too scared to say no," said Mr. Jeremy cheekily. He looked like a waiter for some upscale restaurant, wearing a black bowtie, waistcoat, trousers and long white apron.

Mr. Shin glowered at them.

Miss Jackie and Julia joined them in the living room a few moments later, both in white lacy dresses. Harry thought Julia looked loads prettier with her hair down and no glasses obscuring her eyes. Miss Jackie declared John and Sherlock looked like a Royal couple, and chided John for committing egregious crimes against fashion on a daily basis when more than capable of not committing them in the first place.

Exactly five minutes after six, a portly man in a lime-green bowler hat and a pinstriped cloak appeared inside the private parlour behind the only hinged door in the living room. Everyone crowded around the two-way mirror that was disguised to look like a window from the living room's POV, and a decorative mirror from the private parlour.

" *Science*, got to love it," muttered John as they watched the man sit down heavily in an armchair.

"Red currant rum, minister?" said Mr. Shin as he headed towards the spirit cabinet.

"That would be lovely, thank you," said Fudge. "And so kind of you for inviting me over to your home, I must say."

Mr. Shin hummed as he filled a glass tumbler with a clear reddish-amber liquid. He gave the tumbler to Fudge, who took a long appreciative drink.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" asked Fudge after letting out a contented sigh.

"Sirius Black," said Mr. Shin. "Do you still think he's in the Hogwarts area?"

Harry felt John and Miss Jackie cringe at his brusque tone.

"I'm sure of it," said Fudge shortly.

"You know that the Dementors have searched the whole village twice? The complaints from the residents are rising. And my daughter tells me the number of students suffering night terrors is increasing daily. The situation will only exacerbate the longer they stay."

"Shin, I don't like them any more than you," said Fudge uncomfortably. "But it's necessary precaution. Unfortunate, but there you are. I've just met with some of them. They're in a fury against Dumbledore - he won't let them inside the castle grounds."

"I should think not," said Mr. Shin sharply. "How are the teachers supposed to teach and the students learn with those horrors floating around?"

" *Bravo*, Appa," whispered Miss Jackie as Fudge shrivelled under Mr. Shin's hard gaze.

"All the same," demurred Fudge, "they are there to protect them from something much worse. We all know what Black's capable of…"

Mr. Shin planted both of his lands on his armchair's rests. It was small gesture, done slowly, but somehow he made it look impressive, like the act of a King.

"I'm not convinced I know the worst Black is capable of," said Mr. Shin.

"Well, the worst he *did* is certainly not well known," said Fudge gruffly.

"You speak of his betrayal of the Potters and allegiance to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

"There's more to the story than that," said Fudge in a low rumble. "James Potter trusted Sirius Black beyond all his other friends. They were inseparable during their student years. Nothing changed when they left school. Black was best man when James married Lily. Then they named him godfather to Harry. Harry has no idea, of course. You can imagine how the idea would torment him."

Mr. Shin nodded curtly as his expression turned stonier still. On the other side of the wall, the younger Shins and the Lestrades were looking down awkwardly.

John wrapped an arm around Harry.

"Are you sure you want to listen to this?" John asked.

Harry nodded. He was prepared to listen. It was just… having a name and face to suspected facts. And more details. Which were probably wrong, considering the new set of facts he'd accidentally discovered…

"Not many people are aware that the Potters knew You-Know-Who was after them," Fudge continued once Mr. Shin softened his expression. "Dumbledore, who was of course working tirelessly against You-Know-Who, had a number of useful spies. One of them tipped him off, and he alerted James and Lily at once. He advised them to go into hiding. Well, of course, You-Know-Who wasn't an easy person to hide from. Dumbledore told them that their best chance was the Fidelius Charm."

"What is that?" asked Sherlock sharply.

"An immensely complex spell," said Mr. Jeremy in a very low voice. "It's the magical concealment of a secret inside a single, living soul. Information is hidden inside the chosen person, or Secret-Keeper, and is henceforth impossible to find-unless the Secret-Keeper chooses to divulge it. So if you keep the location of the Potters' safe-house a secret protected by Fidelius, You-Know-Who would never find them as long as the Secret-Keeper keeps quiet, even if he

presses his face against their sitting room window."

"I know the rest of the story," said Mr. Shin, raising a hand. "Black presumably was selected as Secret Keeper. Whether Dumbledore suspected Black was the mole in our side doesn't matter at this point; the Potters were discovered despite the Fidelius. You-Know-Who was unexpectedly vanquished by Harry Potter. Black was cornered shortly afterwards by Peter Pettigrew, another close friend of James Potter."

"Exactly," said Fudge. "Eyewitnesses- Muggles, of course, we wiped their memories later-told us how Pettigrew cornered Black. They say he was sobbing, ' *Lily and James, Sirius! How could you?* ' And then he went for his wand. Well, of course, Black was quicker. Blew Pettigrew to smithereens…"

"You were the junior Minister in the Department of Magical Catastrophes at the time. Did you see the aftermath?"

"I was one of the first on the scene after Black murdered all those people. I- I will never forget it. I still dream about it sometimes. A crater in the middle of the street, so deep it had cracked the sewer below. Bodies everywhere. Muggles screaming. And Black standing there laughing, with what was left of Pettigrew in front of him… a heap of bloodstained robes and a few-a few fragments-"

Fudge stopped abruptly and blew his nose into a lime-green hanky.

"Well, there you have it, Shin," said Fudge thickly. "Black was taken away by twenty members of the Magical Law Enforcement Squad and Pettigrew received the Order of Merlin, First Class. The only remains of Pettigrew we could scavenge from the mess was sent to his poor mother: his finger. I think his hero's death and having *something* to bury brought some comfort. Black's been in Azkaban ever since."

Mr. Shin let out a long sigh.

"That answers some of the questions I had. Thank you, minister. Now if you are not so busy, would you join me and my family for dinner?"

"Well, thank you very much. But I really can't stay. I'm supposed to dine with Dumbledore this evening."

"I see. But at the very least, I would like them to say hello to you. Harry Potter might drop by shortly to join us, and I'm sure-"

" *Harry Potter* ?"

"My son-in-law is friends with both of his adoptive parents, and my daughter Jacqueline is close friends with Harry's adoptive mother."

"Is that so? Well, I suppose I could stay around a bit longer before I head to Hogwarts…"

Everyone sprang to their feet as Fudge started to collect his bowler hat and cloak.

"Christmas tree!" Mr. Jeremy hissed as he pointed at it. "Sit around and look pretty!"

Mr. Lestrade bodily moved both Julia and Miss Jackie to the Christmas tree while John, Sherlock and Harry dashed towards the same direction. Mr. Jason and Mr. Jeremy quickly vanished inside the kitchen, brightened the living room and obscuring the two-way mirror on their way.

When Fudge emerged from the private parlour, Mr. Lestrade was sitting in repose on an armchair, Sherlock was resting on the loveseat opposite to Mr. Lestrade with John reclining against him, and Miss Jackie, Harry and Julia were sitting around the fireplace holding empty mugs.

"Ah, Shin June Hu's family! And I see Harry, too," said Fudge, beaming. "Good evening, everyone; I am Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic."

Everyone knew this already, of course. But as they had been spying on him through a two-way mirror attached to a supposedly private parlor, Fudge wasn't to know that.

Sherlock was the first to rise to his feet, closely followed by John and Harry. Mr. Lestrade and Julia opted to step back and Miss

Jackie to remain where she was.

"Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson," said Mr. Shin, indicating Sherlock and John, "Harry's adoptive parents."

"How do you do," said Sherlock in his most public school accent, hand outstretched.

Fudge smiled indulgently as he shook it, like he was regarding a very young school boy. "Charmed, I'm sure."

John approached next. Fudge was a lot warmer towards John. Harry suddenly realised in the currently coiffured, dressed and bejewelled state, John was a very beautiful woman.

"How do you do, Mrs. Holmes? I must say, you're a very lucky man, Mr. Holmes," said Fudge.

"I know," Sherlock rumbled.

Fudge shook hands with Harry after John. Harry was so jittery he couldn't unlock his jaw long enough to say anything. Mr. Shin moved onto Mr. Lestrade, Julia and Miss Jackie, introducing them as son-in-law, granddaughter, and daughter respectively. Both Mr. Lestrade and Julia were very reserved and nonverbal towards the jovial Fudge, and backed away even further when Mr. Jason and Mr. Jeremy appeared inside the living room carrying trays with covers like tall handsome genies.

"Oh, alright, just a little," said Fudge when Mr. Jason presented his platter full of mouth-watering Hors d'oeuvres and Mr. Jeremy pressed a tall wineglass of eggnog into the minister's hands.

"Thank you for taking the time to meet us, Minister," said John courteously. "I hope we're not intruding into your busy schedule."

"Don't mention it," said Fudge after finishing a Hors d'oeuvre. "I've always meant to see Harry's new guardians."

"I also want to thank you for alerting us non-magicals about the dangers of Sirius Black," John continued. "It would have been so easy for you to just keep us in the dark."

Fudge chuckled heartily. "Well, m'dear, I could dare *not* . Black is a danger to all who crosses his path, magic or Muggle."

"I'm sure you know," said Sherlock.

"Yes, of course," said Fudge, completely missing the hint of sarcasm.

"Still, I really appreciate how you thought about us," said John. "I have always respected statesmen who showed care."

Fudge swelled importantly as he basked in John's full attention; when John gave her full attention to you, it felt like you were the most fascinating person in the world.

"I'm sure you're making good progress in recapturing Black," said John.

"We're certainly doing our best," Fudge replied.

"Thank you. Now I really shouldn't delay you further," said John, looking up at Fudge with dewy eyes.

"Like I said before, don't worry about it," said Fudge, standing to his full, not considerable height. "I'm happy to make time to answer your questions. Anything else you'd like to know, m'dear?"

John hesitated. "I do have one question… but it's so silly."

"Let's hear it," said Fudge, spreading his thick hands.

"I heard a rumour," said John slowly, "that someone gave Black a newspaper a few days before he escaped from prison. I just wondered-could a newspaper trigger something like this? Foolish thinking, I know. But maybe if I knew which newspaper he got, I could rest this stupid idea of mine."

"Oh, is that all?" said Fudge, looking both indulgent and amused. "Well, I can certainly answer that! In my last inspection of Azkaban-that's our prison's name, by the way, in case you didn't know, dear-Black asked me if I could have my paper, he missed doing the crossword. I gave it to him."

Sherlock was immediately alert. "Do you know which paper and what edition?"

"The *Daily Prophet*, of course. But I don't remember the exact date-"

"The headline at least?" Sherlock pressed.

Fudge scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"Ah, yes, I remember now. It was about the Annual *Daily Prophet* draw. Arthur Weasley won, if I recall correctly."

John immediately grinded a heel into Sherlock's foot before his super-creepy Joker grin spread across his face.

"Thank you so much, Minister. That assures me a lot. I knew it was just a stupid idea."

"You're very welcome."

Everyone kept their faces straight until Fudge left the house.

"That was simultaneously the most awesome and terrifying thing I've ever seen," said Mr. Lestrade fervently while Mr. Jeremy and Mr. Jason nodded feverishly in agreement.

"Enjoyed yourself?" asked Sherlock, his voice heavy with irony.

" *No* . I thought I was going die," John declared. "If you ever make me do something like this again, I'm going to kill you, I'm serious."

Sherlock put on his most horrible smirk.

"Sure. Anything for you, *m'dear* ."

Final Notes : Robert as a Customer Service Rep was too funny to resist, so I went with the idea despite not having planned it at all. Then I sat down and actually thought how wizards and witches of HP would respond to a very Muggle interview that requires IT. I was entirely too amused at the ensuing ideas. :D

The aluminum foil and baking soda solution really works. Try it out, folks! (But not jewelry! ETA: Jewelry often has other things besides silver [like gems and alloys] that could react in the solution too. Better safe than sorry unless you are certain the silver jewelry is all non-reactive or all silver)

Sherlock is now on the last stretch in figuring out the mystery related to Sirius. The *other* case however…

Shifts over Christmas

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). **Brief mention of Exceptionally Cruel Bullying** . Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Eight: Shifts over Christmas

John woke up Christmas morning and blinked at the dazzling, opaline sunlight illuminating the bedroom window. The chill that pervaded the air made the thought of leaving bed absolutely torturous. If only Harry was still a little boy, leaving bed before noon wouldn't have been a *necessary* option because-

"Harry, you're *thirteen-years-old*," said Sherlock's voice, ringing the draughty air with his exasperation.

John glanced to the side. What she'd previously thought was Sherlock was actually Harry, who apparently decided to squirm under the covers and settle into the narrow space between them overnight.

"It's freezing up there," Harry said, face down. "And the walls still have holes in them."

" *Grow up*," Sherlock groused.

John let out a breathy laugh and closed her eyes again.

Arthur wasn't paying much attention when Mr. Granger mentioned Hermione had invited Julia Lestrade to their Christmas luncheon, as he was distracted by his surroundings as soon as he brought Ron and Ginny to the Grangers' house. It was only when Mrs. Granger said Julia's grandfather was going to drop Julia off and maybe even stay around a bit did his attention unpleasantly draw back to the present.

"Uh, which grandfather…?"

"She only has one," piped Hermione, making Arthur's heart sink.

It wasn't that Arthur disapproved Shin June Hu, like he did Lucius Malfoy, but Shin's capacity for breathtakingly merciless revenges was something of a legend. Arthur only knew of two incidents, but either case was enough to make a person be extremely wary of Shin: first was the infamous Incident of 1962, when Shin developed a curse that specifically targeted a person's magic and rendered one unable to use magic in response to the kidnapping of his first wife, Huang Yue Ying. Though Shin had removed the curse's effects after the responsible Death Eaters were apprehended, the fact he had the power to take away a person's magic left many witches and wizards deeply afraid of him. The fear turned to panic when an Unspeakable used the curse to revenge himself, turning an uncounted number of magic people into functional Squibs. The second incident was only a rumour, but the story was in line with Shin's reputation. Word had it several Muggles students had singled out his Squib daughter for the cruellest sort of bullying: they threw her into ditches, locked her in tiny cleaning closets for hours and followed her around yelling that she should hurry up and die because the sight of her sickly form was causing their eyes to bleed. Shin reputedly placed a curse that made the students feel the pain and misery his daughter felt a hundredfold. The account of the aftermath of the curse varied-ranging from suicide to psychotic breaks of all affected persons before the day was over-but it wasn't hard to imagine what it would've been like if the curse were real and it had actually happened.

Thus Arthur was unable to enjoy the Grangers' hospitality and home as much as he could, for he was busy worrying and fretting over

how he should react to Shin (besides showing him silent respect). Then promptly at ten thirty, Shin June Hu showed up with his three grown children and four young grandchildren.

"Jason Shin. Please excuse the crowd," said the handsome young man wearing frayed jeans and a hoodie under his puffy green coat that was being pulled to opposite directions by Rupert and Martin. "We're looking after my BIL's children today, and they all wanted to come along."

"Jeremy Shin," said the other young man, equally handsome as Jason, but in a different way; also in contrast to his brother, he was wearing a sleek suit and high-quality shirt that was slowly disintegrating under baby Elise's oral ministrations. "We'll scarper off once they let go of Julia."

"Jacqueline Shin," said the smiling young woman holding Julia's hand. She was pretty, but not in a conventional way, and her hip-length black hair and dark, fathomless eyes were particularly striking against the pallor of her white face. "This is our father: Shin June Hu."

Shin, who despite being even shorter than his petite daughter, managed to make everyone else look oversized and inelegant in his subdued outfit of blues and greys, humming, "Mmn."

Mr. and Mrs. Granger invited the whole ménage of Shins and Lestrades inside. Hermione tried to usher Julia to her room where Ron and Ginny were at, but Elise started screaming when Julia left her proximity, and Martin and Rupert transferred their grips from Jason to their older sister and clung like limpets.

"Oh, my, someone doesn't want their sister to leave their sight," said Mrs. Granger as Hermione wisely decided to bring Ron and Ginny to the living room instead.

"They've been fussy all day," said Jeremy, looking deeply apologetic. "I think it's because their mother took to bed because of morning-sickness."

"Oh, Lestrade is expecting a new baby? That's wonderful!"

"Yeah, they're having a boy," said Jason, beaming and waving his hands about. "He's going to be *soooo* cute."

Arthur relaxed after this. The few facts he knew about the Grandmaster's family was what he'd heard from Ron and his limited impression at Diagon Alley the year before. He'd rather imagined a very solemn, reserved and grave sort of family, just like Shin, except perhaps Ms. Jacqueline. Clearly he was wrong.

Arthur started to panic when Mr. Granger tried to make small talk by asking Shin what he did.

"Child minder," Shin replied monotonously without any expression.

"And part-time lecturer at Queen's," Jason Shin added.

" *And* the head of Department of Mysteries," chimed Jeremy Shin.

" *Silence*," Shin growled just as Jacqueline opened her mouth (Arthur dared to wonder what the fourth role was).

Shin stayed with his grandchildren after the short exchange. He entertained them by conjuring a multitude of beautiful puppets and enacting a play no one was familiar with, controlling the actions and words of the puppets nonverbally with only tiny movements of his fingers.

"So you never use a wand?" asked Mr. Granger.

"I do when I have to summon EF5 tornadoes," said Shin.

Only the Grangers laughed at the comment. They stopped as soon as they realised this.

"He's not joking?" whispered Mrs. Granger.

" *I have no idea*," Jason whispered back. "The few times I thought he made a joke, it turned out he was completely serious. Like, when I was ten, I asked him if I was going to be short like him, and he told me it was highly unlikely I'd be anything less than six feet because he's actually *six feet two* . He said he shrunk himself a foot shorter because he doesn't like being tall-makes buying clothes and walking

through doors a pain. Well, I don't know about six feet two, but he was completely right about me growing up to six feet."

"Wait, he told me he shrunk himself because being six feet two makes him too scary!" exclaimed Jeremy.

Jason stared at his brother, mouth open.

"He *is* actually six feet two?" he said incredulously, " *how?* !"

Jason and Jeremy descended upon their father and demanded he transform back to his full height, because their life didn't make sense anymore. Shin ignored them rather pointedly. Undeterred, they brought their sister Jacqueline into the fray. Jacqueline argued the idea he'd kept himself a foot shorter than his actual height for decades was ludicrous because how was he keeping his organs and nerve system intact, then?

Shin let out an aggrieved sigh after she said this. Then he put baby Elise to the side, and close his eyes.

Immediately he started changing; bare legs and arms shot out of their respective clothes holes as his limbs lengthened; his entire torso expanded in all directions and his shoulders broadened correspondingly. A moment later a very tall, lean but powerfully built man wearing Shin June Hu's face was sitting where the small Shin used to be, wearing clothes that were obviously meant for someone a foot shorter. Everyone was gaping at him.

"It's as I feared," Jason moaned as his siblings slumped against each other. "My dad has no sense of humour."

"I did warn you," said Shin, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. "Now if you are quite satisfied…"

"Actually, I like you six feet two," said Jeremy seriously. "Stay like that."

"I'm not altering my wardrobe. It's too much work."

"Appa, you only own like five things. And isn't it harder to buy clothes when you're five feet two in the UK?"

Shin considered this. Then he shrunk himself again, but only halfway. Jeremy groaned.

"Aaaand he turns himself five feet seven. Appa, you are a ridiculous human being," Jeremy declared as he altered his father's outfit to fit with an artful swish of his wand.

" *Hear, hear*," muttered Arthur very quietly.

Despite the unexpected-and dare say, unsettling- interlude, the Grangers continued to speak with the Shins. Mr. Granger and Jacqueline chatted amiably about Hermione's flute lessons and GSCE preparations. Jason joined Mrs. Granger at the kitchen, rolling his sleeves and saying, "No, no, I enjoy this-I'm a professional chef." Jeremy took over the children entertainment, twirling Elise around with his wand, and Martin and Rupert clamoured for their turn, when they weren't asking their grandpa levitate them, much to Shin's apparent chagrin.

In the corner of his eye, Arthur saw Ron, Ginny, Hermione and Julia slip into a room down the hall…

"So what's the scoop?" asked Ron immediately after Hermione closed the door to the guest room.

"Sirius Black didn't kill all those people," said Julia grimly. "He simply couldn't have."

" *What?* !" Ron, Ginny and Hermione exclaimed.

Julia whipped out a sketch book from her tote, turned over to a page and set it face up on the floor.

"This is a sketch of the scene where the curse happened," said Julia. "It's based on the CCTV footage that filmed the whole thing. Sherlock figured out where it must've happened based on the dates, and my dad managed to get hold of the footage through his police contacts. He wouldn't show me the actual crime scene photos; I had to nag him for *days* to get hold of this," the last bit was added a bit huffily.

"It was caught on tape?" said Hermione, surprised.

"Yes, but the police didn't think to examine it because their memories were modified to think it was a gas explosion. The Ministry of Magic didn't remove them because the hit-wizards at the time didn't know about CCTV."

The four of them bent over to study the sketch. There was a large oval shaped like a very fat egg labelled 'a *ffected blast area* ', which had a much smaller circle labeled ' *epicentre* ' about a quarter of the way from the longer end of the major axis. Twelve humanoid figures were drawn inside and just outside the blast area. A tiny finger was drawn at the edge of the epicentre, and the little arrow that pointed it out was labelled ' *Pettigrew's finger* '. A few inches outside the large oval was a small circle labelled ' *Sirius Black* '.

"The key is the finger," said Julia, placing her forefinger on it. "Pettigrew's finger was the only bit of him found at the scene. Now, if Pettigrew was *blown up* at an angle, you'd expect his finger to show up far from the epicentre."

Hermione, Ron and Ginny nodded, though the latter two knew nothing about physics.

"As you can see, it was discovered just *outside* the epicentre," Julia continued. "But maybe it was freak accident. That brings me to the more important point: the coroner report said the finger was *cut off*, not blasted off."

"How did the Muggles figure that out?" asked Ginny.

"When you cut flesh, the muscle fibres and bone will show signs of being *sliced* . If flesh is blasted off by force, you see a lot of rough and uneven tearing. The coroner's report on Pettigrew's finger said the digit was *cut off* very cleanly when the owner was still alive because the muscle fibres were *sliced* and there was plenty of bleeding, and dead people don't bleed. CCTV footage show all the Muggle victims were at least six feet away from Black and Pettigrew, and Pettigrew was pointing his wand behind his back just before the curse was cast. Do you know what this means?"

Hermione covered her mouth with both of her hands. "You're not suggesting-"

"Pettigrew was the one who cast the curse; he cut off his finger to make it look like Black was the one who cast the curse and killed him in the process," Julia concluded.

There was stunned silence for a span of a minute. Even Scabbers, who was hiding in Ron's pocket as usual, trembled as though sensing the weight of the unexpected truth.

"So the Ministry arrested the wrong man?" squeaked Ginny. "How could this happen? Why didn't Black defend himself at his trial?"

"There *wasn't* a trial," said Julia in hushed tones. "The Ministry of Magic was still operating under Martial Law when he was arrested. The Head of the Magical Law Enforcement at the time sentenced Black to life in Azkaban without a trial because his crime was 'too obvious'."

There was another stunned silence.

"So Black spent *twelve years* in Azkaban for a crime he didn't commit," whispered Hermione. "And the real murderer got an award for *framing* him."

"… This is messed up," both Ron and Ginny declared.

There was a long pause.

"So what's happening now?" asked Hermione.

"Grandpa alerted Dumbledore and the current head investigator of Sirius Black's case about the new found evidence," Julia replied. "The problem is getting the sort of evidence you can present to the Wizengamot."

"What do you mean? Isn't there enough evidence to prove he's innocent?"

"Yes, but the problem is, it is all *Muggle* evidence," Julia said. "It's based on *science.* Can you imagine explaining to a bunch of old

wizards and witches the difference between cut muscle fibres and blasted off muscle fibres and the underlying physics of explosions?"

Hermione sighed deeply. "Forget it. Never mind science, most wizards and witches don't have an ounce of *logic* ."

"Exactly. So unless the Ministry, I don't know, finds Black's old wand and somehow show the Jury he didn't use a curse that could've cut off Pettigrew's finger, let alone kill thirteen people, we're stuck."

They stewed in another bout of silence.

"Is there anything else your grandpa told you?" asked Ginny.

"He just said: 'don't worry about it'," said Julia wearily. "That usually means he's doing something scary."

"… *Blimey*," said Ron with feeling. Though he didn't fear Grandmaster Shin as he used to, after seeing him comfort Ginny after the Riddle diary thing last year, he didn't doubt Mr. Shin could be as terrifying as everyone said he was.

"What about Sherlock? What is he doing?" asked Hermione.

"He's wrestling with the last remaining problem. See, it makes sense Black remained Azkaban for the last twelve years. He wouldn't have found the *emotive energy* to escape, not with Dementors guarding his cell day and night. He might've found a way to reduce their influence, but he couldn't've have found a way to completely block it, not without a wand. He's a *human being*, so he'll always have emotions, whether he likes it or not, and he can't stay vigilant to guard his emotions *all the time* . Black only found the strong enough motive-anger, probably-to try breaking out of prison this summer. The thing that gave him the motive was the copy of the *Daily Prophet* Fudge gave him. But there's nothing on that copy of the *Prophet* as far as we can see that could've given him the motive; the only photograph it had was you and your family at Egypt after winning the Annual *Prophet* Draw and the rest of the articles were humdrum news. What did Black see that made him move?"

Ron scratched his head. "Why is finding this out important?"

"Daddy said unless we find this out, Black will stay hidden unless he makes a mistake. Black has no reason to trust anyone. He'll likely react very badly to any attempts of approach, and we don't want that. So we have to find out quickly and use that knowledge to gain his trust."

"But if the Ministry exonerates him and the *Prophet* runs the article, maybe he'll turn himself in," said Hermione.

Julia let out an explosive sigh. "What if he thinks the article is a trap? What guarantee do we have Black is even reading the *Prophet* ? There're too many variables there."

There was another pause.

"So, as usual, it's all up to Sherlock," said Ron. He shook his head. "You know, the whole situation's mad when you think about it: A Muggle is doing a better job at solving magic crime than Wizards, and the Ministry of Magic throws people into prison without a trial. What's become of our world, eh?"

Christmas spirit was definitely thin on the ground in 221B after everyone left bed. Harry displayed little appetite at lunchtime, and rather sombrely unwrapped his presents by the Christmas tree (decorated in Narnia theme this year). The only bit of levity occurred when John opened an anonymous gift that contained John's old RAMC mug with a little note that simply said: ' *apologies* '. John snorted before turning serious again.

"What d'you think is going to happen?" Harry asked quietly after examining the new broom someone got for him.

It was Sherlock who eventually answered:

"Best Case scenario: Sirius Black is publicly exonerated, and Pettigrew is apprehended at Hogwarts. Dementors return to Azkaban. Pettigrew is tried and convicted of mass-murder. Odds: small, and very unlikely.

"Most probable scenario: Sirius Black is quietly exonerated when the

Yard makes a huge fuss and the Minister hears about it. Dementors return to Azkaban. Ministry of Magic makes little move to apprehend Pettigrew to avoid further embarrassment. Odds: high, holding steady."

"And the worst case scenario?"

"Sirius Black is found by Dementors and given the 'Kiss'. Ministry of Magic pardons him posthumously when the Yard makes a huge fuss and the Minister hears about it. Pettigrew remains at large. Odds: unknown, but not zero."

Harry went still for a moment.

"If the best case scenario happens, what will happen? Fudge said Sirius Black is my *godfather* . Doesn't that mean he has custody over me?"

Neither John nor Sherlock answered. Harry bowed his head.

"I don't want to leave," he whispered.

John came over and warped her arm around Harry. After a long period of comforting silence, John started to speak:

"Harry, I'm not going to do something stupid like promising you it's going to be alright. *Because nothing we do will ever make it alright* . Sirius will never get those twelve years back, and he's probably going to need *years* of therapy just to sort-of get over his Azkaban experience. But we can't overlook him. And this I can promise you: Sherlock and I are going to fight for you stay and we won't pull any punches, I mean it."

Harry let out a series of weak snorts before calming down.

"You're gonna bring down the Ministry."

"If that's what it takes, yes," said Sherlock matter-of-factly. "But for now, we'll consider less strenuous solutions."

Harry laughed again.

John spent a very lazy Christmas evening after sending a considerably brightened in spirit Harry to Hermione's. John gamely tried to distract Sherlock from his contemplation of the copy of the *Daily Prophet* that triggered the whole Sirius Black mess, but her efforts were in vain. So John left him at it and played around with the newest version of the MMN phone, which Jackie sent for Christmas. It now had a holographic user manual, where a tiny 3D image of Jacqueline demonstrated the basic functionalities for first time users. John vaguely wondered how Jackie got it to work. The last time Jackie mentioned the MMN user manual, she was frustrated by the fact the ideal version she *wanted* to distribute required too much magic for her to create, none of the students had the necessary skill and knowledge to make it for her and she was wary of asking her father's help because that might open the floodgates of future meddling. Perhaps the new worker she hired last week helped her out. Jackie was as lavish in her praise of his usefulness as she was in vocalizing her despair over his appalling inability to dress himself.

John fell asleep after reading and replying to Harry's tenth text about Ron's pet rat Scabbers's disappearance. Ron was convinced Hermione's cat Crookshanks had finally eaten him after unsuccessfully trying to for the last three months, and Hermione was equally convinced her cat had done no such thing. Harry was inclined to agree with Hermione since Crookshanks showed no evidence of recent rodent consumption (clean mouth, teeth and fur), but was wondering how he was supposed to break the news. Ron was deeply upset at Scabbers' apparent death, thus was in no mood to hear the truth.

A sudden movement from Sherlock's side of the table awakened John.

"Did you figure something out?" John murmured sleepily.

Sherlock sat in silence, staring. Then he lean forward and cupped John's face with both hands.

"John," he whispered, "would you be afraid to sleep with a lunatic, a man with softening of the brain, an idiot whose mind has lost its grip?"

"No," John answered in astonishment.

"Good," he said. Then he carried John bridal style to the bedroom.

Severus was enjoying a reasonably good Christmas day, which in itself was a minor miracle all things considered. Watson sent a card as promised. Inside the obviously Muggle Christmas card, which had cartoon reindeer standing on their hind-legs on the front, was a sticker of a gold medal plus decorative ribbons. The handwritten script underneath the medal said: *Winner of Colossal Prat Awards; Severus Snape; Merry Christmas, you bastard; JW.* A crude doodle of Watson sticking out her tongue was drawn in the corner. After snorting at the card and carefully putting it away, Severus went to the Great Hall.

As usual, the House tables had been moved against the walls and a single table, set for nine, stood in the middle of the room. Dumbledore, McGonagall, Sprout, and Flitwick joined him shortly, along with Filch, the caretaker, who had taken off his usual brown coat and was wearing a very old and rather mouldy-looking tailcoat. There were only three students, two extremely nervous-looking first years and a sullen-faced Slytherin fifth year.

"Merry Christmas!" said Dumbledore once everyone expected settled down at the table. "As there are so few of us, it seemed foolish to use the House tables… now dig in!"

As Severus was helping himself to some wine (and resolutely ignoring the cracker Dumbledore was offering), the doors of the Great Hall opened. It was Sibyll Trelawney, gliding toward them as though on wheels. She had put on a green sequined dress in honour of the occasion, making her look like a glittering, oversized dragonfly.

"Sybill, this is a pleasant surprise!" said Dumbledore, standing up.

"I have been crystal gazing, Headmaster," said Trelawney in her mistiest, most faraway voice, "and to my astonishment, I saw myself abandoning my solitary luncheon and coming to join you. Who am I

to refuse the promptings of fate? I at once hastened from my tower, and I do beg you to forgive my lateness…"

"Certainly, certainly," said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. "Let me draw you up a chair-"

Dumbledore drew a chair in midair with his wand, which revolved for a few seconds before falling with a thud between Severus and McGonagall. Severus sighed at the theatrics. Trelawney lowered herself into the empty chair, eyes closed as though in meditation. Professor McGonagall poked a large spoon into the nearest tureen.

"Tripe, Sybill?"

Trelawney ignored her. Eyes open again, she looked around once more and said, "But where is dear Professor Lupin?"

"I'm afraid the poor fellow is ill again," said Dumbledore, indicating that everybody should start serving themselves. "Most unfortunate that it should happen on Christmas Day."

"But surely you already knew that, Sybill?" said McGonagall, her eyebrows raised.

Trelawney gave McGonagall a very cold look.

"Certainly I knew, Minerva," she said quietly. "But one does not parade the fact that one is All-Knowing. I frequently act as though I am not possessed of the Inner Eye, so as not to make others nervous."

"That explains a great deal," said McGonagall tartly.

Severus tried his best not to laugh as Trelawney's voice suddenly became a good deal less misty.

"If you must know, Minerva, I have seen that poor Professor Lupin will not be with us for very long. He seems aware, himself, that his time is short. He positively fled when I offered to crystal gaze for him-"

"Imagine that," said McGonagall dryly.

"I doubt," said Dumbledore, in a cheerful but slightly raised voice, which put an end to McGonagall and Trelawney's cat fight, "that Professor Lupin is in any immediate danger. Severus, you've made the potion for him again?"

"Yes, Headmaster," said Severus.

"Good," said Dumbledore. "Then he should be up and about in no time… Derek, have you had any of the chipolatas? They're excellent."

The first-year boy went furiously red on being addressed directly by Dumbledore, and took the platter of sausages with trembling hands.

Trelawney behaved almost normally until the very end of Christmas dinner, two hours later. The three students, full to bursting with Christmas dinner and still wearing their cracker hats, got up from the table and left the Great Hall. Severus had just finished his glass of wine was thinking of returning to his quarters when a loud, harsh voice spoke next him.

" *IT WILL HAPPEN TONIGHT* ."

Severus wheeled around. Trelawney had gone rigid in her chair; her eyes were unfocused and her mouth sagging.

"Pardon?" said Severus.

But Trelawney didn't seem to hear him. Her eyes started to roll. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. Severus hesitated, weighing his options as his fellow teachers stared. Then Trelawney spoke again, in the same harsh voice, quite unlike her usual voice, but in the same time strangely familiar…

" *THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANT HAS BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT… THE SERVANT WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN HIS MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANT'S AID, GREATER AND MORE TERRIBLE THAN EVER HE WAS. TONIGHT… BEFORE MIDNIGHT… THE*

SERVANT… WILL SET OUT… TO REJOIN… HIS MASTER… "

Trelawney's head fell forward onto her chest. She made a grunting sort of noise. Then, quite suddenly, Trelawney's head snapped up again.

"I'm so sorry," she said dreamily, "I drifted off for a moment…"

Everyone continued to stare at her.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing untoward," said Dumbledore, looking mildly impressed.

"… Was she making a genuine prediction?" asked McGonagall after Trelawney headed back to the Divination tower.

"Do you know, Minerva, I think she might have been." Dumbledore said thoughtfully. "Who'd have thought it? That brings her total of real predictions up to two. I should offer her a pay raise…"

Final Notes : Of course, it would've taken a long time for Sherlock and Lestrade to grab hold of the incident reports from twelve years ago-if they followed regular due process and if they began looking for them when the holidays started. But if Sherlock started digging the moment Harry told him about the Pettigrew glitch, and they had the help of, say, a certain minor government official, they would've got hold of the microfilms that stored the data a lot faster…

What bothered me the most about Sirius's situation was the *loss* ; granting him public exoneration and all the money in the world isn't going to give him back the twelve year he'd lost and missed. At least now everyone (sort of) knows Sirius is innocent. They just need to find him and convince him they're not out to get him. Without Peter. Alas.

Early update for you! I swear it only took me eight hours to finish writing the whole thing.

Digging Deeper into Alarm

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Thirty Nine: Digging Deeper into Alarm

It looked like the end of Ron and Hermione's friendship had come by the end of Christmas day. Each was so angry with the other that Harry couldn't see how they'd ever make up. Ron was enraged that Hermione had never taken Crookshanks' attempts to eat Scabbers seriously, hadn't bothered to keep a close enough watch on him, and was still trying to pretend that Crookshanks was innocent by suggesting that Ron look for Scabbers outside in the morning. Hermione, meanwhile, maintained fiercely that Ron had no proof that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers, that Ron had been prejudiced against her cat ever since Crookshanks had landed on Ron's head in the Magical Menagerie, and besides, why in the world he did bring Scabbers to her home when he *knew* Crookshanks would be there?

"He wouldn't stay put!" Ron said miserably. "He kept clinging to the insides of my pocket and wouldn't let go!"

"Yeah, that's true," said Ginny.

"Chose the comfort of your pocket over safety from Crookshanks, yeah?" said Julia wryly, at which point Hermione lost her temper with all them.

"Oh, fine! Side with Ron, I knew you all would!" she said shrilly. "Everything's *my* fault, isn't it?"

"No, no, that's not what I *meant* !" said Julia, reaching out to Hermione, but she just jerked Julia's hand out of the way and marched into her room, slamming the door shut.

Julia, Mr. and Mrs. Granger spent the next hour trying to cajole Hermione out of her room, while Ginny and Harry attempted to cheer Ron up. For all his moaning over Scabbers, Ron had taken the loss of his rat very hard indeed.

"I reckon Scabbers is still alive," said Harry. "He's very hardy, especially for a Rat that's six-years-old."

"That's not the point," said Ron, glaring resentfully at Hermione's bedroom. "If she just *acted* like she was sorry- but she'll never admit she's wrong, Hermione. She thinks as long as *Crookshanks* didn't eat Scabbers it's all fine."

In a last ditch effort to find a way to mediate between his two friends, Harry texted John, but John said talking to someone who was not willing to listen was futile.

It was looking like the sleepover was going to be cancelled, when Sherlock called him.

"Where is Scabbers, did you find him?" Sherlock demanded.

"No," said Harry. "Mr. Jason and Jeremy are still looking around, but they aren't optimistic."

Sherlock's face clouded over.

"Pass me over to Grandmaster Shin."

Harry put Sherlock on holographic projection and speaker after Mr. Shin came over (as well as everyone else).

"We need to find that rat," Sherlock declared. "Peter Pettigrew is Ron's pet rat 'Scabbers'."

It took a few seconds for the absurdity of this statement to sink in.

"You're mental," Ron gasped.

"Ridiculous!" said Hermione faintly, surprising Harry with her presence.

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Shin, eyes burning.

"The edition of the *Daily Prophet* Black received had only one article of interest: the headline," explained Sherlock in rapid-fire fashion. "The accompanying photograph features Arthur's family. It is highly unlikely featured persons are someone other than who they appear to be. Someone in the family would've noted the person was acting 'off' otherwise. That leaves only the pet Rat as potentially something other than what it appears to be."

"You're mad," Ron repeated shakily. "Scabbers is just a *rat* ."

Sherlock ignored him. "Arthur, how long has your family had Scabbers?"

"… I don't know," said Mr. Weasley, still looking stunned. "Percy found him in our orchard… before he left for Hogwarts, I think?"

"Too long for a common garden rat to stay alive, don't you think?"

"We-we've taken good care of him-" Ron protested.

Sherlock ignored that too. "Has he been missing his toe since the start?"

Mr. Weasley went slack-jawed. "Yes, I remember Molly telling Percy: you don't want that rat, it's missing a toe."

"Don't you see?" said Sherlock impatiently, frustration radiating out of every angle of his face. "The only bit of Pettigrew your people recovered was his *finger.* We know the finger was cut off when the owner was still alive. We also know *Pettigrew* is still alive via the Marauder's map, the Holographic map and the testimony of the Hogwarts' ghosts. Explanation: the missing finger remained missing when Pettigrew transformed into a rat to flee from the law; after

fleeing, Pettigrew insinuated himself into Arthur's household as a pet-both to hide and to keep tabs on the wizard world, no doubt; the Marauder's map picked up his presence when Percy- and later Ron- brought him to Hogwarts, and it wrote his true name rather than the one he is going by."

Even after the explanation that had the same rigor of reasoning that was characteristic of Sherlock, Harry continued to stare blankly. It was just too much to swallow. How could Scabbers be Pettigrew? *But* . Sherlock was rarely wrong on this sort of thing, and didn't he always tell him: once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth…? Pettigrew as an Animagus was not *impossible*, so…

Then Hermione spoke, in a trembling, would-be calm sort of voice, as though trying to will Sherlock to talk sensibly.

"But Scabbers *can't* be Pettigrew… it just *can't* be true… you know it *can't*…"

"Why not?" said Sherlock, eyebrow raised.

"Because… because people would know if Peter Pettigrew had been an Animagus. We did Animagi in class with Professor McGonagall. I looked them up when I did my homework- the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there's a register showing what animal they become, and their markings and things… and I went and looked Professor McGonagall up on the register, and there have been only seven Animagi this century, and Pettigrew's name wasn't on the list."

Harry had barely had time to marvel inwardly at the effort Hermione put into her homework, when Sherlock gave her a deeply pitying look.

"If everyone did what they are supposed to do, the world would be at peace and the police and I would be out of a job. He's an *illegal* Animagus. *Obviously* ."

"But why would he try being an Animagus at all?" Hermione still argued, "The Animagus transformation can go horribly wrong-one

reason the Ministry keeps a close watch on those attempting to do it!"

"We can ask Pettigrew that question after we catch him," said Sherlock dismissively, before turned very serious. "Dr. Shin, are you willing to risk the possibility of letting an actual murderer go free just because of it's too hard to believe who the murderer is?"

Mr. Shin looked at him piercingly.

"I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt," he said. "You have been highly accurate so far. There's no reason to believe you are not accurate right now. Luckily, the search for the rat is still on."

"Are you going all out?"

"I am, as a matter of fact. Pets are a serious business."

"Are you kidding me?"

"I do not *kid*," said Mr. Shin severely.

"He really doesn't," sighed Miss Jackie. "He and humour are not on speaking terms."

"In all seriousness," said Mr. Shin, interrupting, "Mr. Holmes, you've done your part. I will take it from here. Thank you for your input."

Sherlock was about to open his mouth, but Mr. Shin made a diagonal zipping gesture and the connection was cut off, eliminating the holographic projection in the process.

"Appa, that was rude," Miss Jackie chided.

"He will risk another memory erasure if he continues to get himself involved," said Mr. Shin. "His very existence speaks against the popular notion that non-Magical people simply do not notice nor understand magic. No need for the Ministry to be aware of this and work to destroy that magnificent mind of his."

Miss Jackie nodded.

"We must go to the Ministry," Mr. Shin continued, standing tall. "Arthur Weasley, follow me; Jacqueline, standby."

Mr. Shin put both hands forward and made a grasping gesture, like he was grabbing hold of the very fabric of reality. Then he tore open a hole in the empty space, which revealed a hallway that drew recognition from Mr. Weasley, Ron and Ginny. Without changing his expression, Mr. Shin marched right through the long, lens-shaped hole. Mr. Weasley followed after him, looking completely dazed.

As soon as Mr. Weasley walked through the hole, it sealed itself and vanished.

"You… you don't call him *Grandmaster* for nothing, do you?" said Mr. Granger shakily after a long pause.

All the magic people shook their heads.

Several things happened after Sherlock announced his final deduction regarding Peter Pettigrew. Jason and Jeremy alerted their father that they'd found Ron's pet rat in a sewer nearby. Shin ordered them to keep the rat immobilized and bring it to the Ministry of Magic. Then Shin made a fire-call to the previous Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

" *Bartemius Crouch!* "

An elderly man whose grey hair was parted almost unnaturally straight, and whose narrow toothbrush moustache looked as though it had been trimmed using a ruler, eventually answered the call.

"What is it, Shin?" said Crouch irritably.

"You've asked me to keep you abreast of any new developments in Sirius Black's recapture, and I'm honouring that request," said Shin brusquely. "The Muggle law enforcement has uncovered *film footage* that shows Sirius Black did NOT cast the Blasting Curse that killed twelve Muggles. They are working under the assumption Black escaped prison to prove his innocence even as I speak. We also uncovered evidence that show *Peter Pettigrew is still alive* ."

Crouch's eyes started to pop alarmingly. "Are you serious?"

"When have I ever made a joke?"

"Are you at the Auror's office?"

"Yes, and I'm going to alert Dawlish. If I'm not there, he will be."

"Excellent. I will be there in a few minutes."

Shin's head disappeared from the emerald flames in the Crouches' fireplace with a faint pop. Crouch rose from his seat, but he immediately pitched forward when a savage blow landed on the back of his head…

Elsewhere in London, unbeknownst to the Magic community, two Muggles were discussing Magic matters.

"I can't believe it took me this long to figure it out," Sherlock grumbled into John's sternum. "It should've been *obvious* the moment we learned only Pettigrew's *finger* was recovered from the scene and we found the exact newspaper that triggered Black's jailbreak."

"I'm shocked you managed to figure out the connection *at all*," said John, rubbing his head consolingly.

Sherlock relaxed under John's hair massage. "I'm disappointed at Hermione. I thought she was cleverer than that."

"Law-abiding suburbanites, good students of true human nature do not make."

The rumbling noise Sherlock made was very much akin to purring.

"But oh, the horrors they are capable of creating. One of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine is that I must look at everything with reference to the Work. You look at a charming suburbia and countrysides and are impressed by the peacefulness it presents. I think of the horrors one could commit with impunity simply because

no one expects it. At least in London, one's sense that evil is always at bay is sharp. In those isolated, sterile areas that sense is blunted thanks to residents' sheer wilful ignorance of evil."

"Okay, now you're creeping me out with your sinister musings. Let's see if we can change your mood a bit."

There was an interval.

"Feeling better?" asked John.

Sherlock nodded. "Especially since the whole wretched business is now about to end."

But Sherlock proved incorrect the next morning, when the *Daily Prophet* 's headlines announced the capture of Peter Pettigrew-alive and an unregistered rat Animagus to boot-and his subsequent daring escape from the Ministry of Magic shortly after an important, unnamed Ministry Official was attacked at his home.

"How did he manage to *escape* ?" Sherlock asked over the phone immediately upon reading the article.

Mr. Shin looked remorseful.

"It's my fault. I should've stayed until he was transported to Azkaban-or alerted Dumbledore first," he said.

"So it happened after your departure?"

"And while Dawlish waited for the minister to appear. Unfortunately, Fudge was in the middle of entertaining foreign dignitaries and didn't arrive until many hours later."

"What kind Minister delays matters of Homeland security over Christmas parties?"

"One who believes he need not hurry when it appears his trusted underlings has everything under control."

Sherlock exhaled loudly. "I despair over your current Administration."

"As do I of yours. But Dawlish and I were able to verify the fact Pettigrew was indeed an unregistered Animagus and impossibly still alive. I'm certain Dawlish would not have been caught unawares if the third party-yes, I do not doubt there was one-didn't put the 'Important Ministry Official' under the Imperius Curse and stunned him before escaping with Peter. I am not convinced all the facts will be enough to exonerate Black immediately, but the current Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement has called for reinvestigation."

"What are they going to do about the Dementors?" asked John.

Mr. Shin pursed his lips. "Fudge decided the Dementors must remain where they are as it is not *completely* clear Sirius Black is innocent. He might, after all, have been working independently or in league with Pettigrew."

"… How can he even *think* that's possible?" asked Sherlock incredulously.

"Mighty good show of loyalty, staying in Azkaban for twelve years to keep Peter out it, yeah?" said John.

"For his defence, I should mention Fudge is very distraught at the unexpected turn of events," said Mr. Shin. "Again, I'm deeply sorry how things turned out."

"Not your fault your colleagues are idiots," said Sherlock.

"Don't call my friends idiots," Mr. Shin growled. "One more thing before I go. Is your son present?"

Harry scampered over to join the conversation he was eavesdropping on from the kitchen.

"A *genuine prophecy* was made yesterday," said Mr. Shin solemnly. "I am alerting you as the Head of Department of Mysteries since it concerns Harry in particular."

All three people started: Sherlock with guarded scepticism; John and Harry with palpable surprise. Mr. Shin proceeded without further ado:

" *The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than he ever was.* "

"… Ridiculous," Sherlock muttered.

"It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not," said Mr. Shin bluntly. "But do not say I didn't warn you."

And with that, Mr. Shin's holographic image vanished.

Harry spent the rest of Boxing Day brooding over the prophecy and feeling a strong sense an even bigger storm was brewing outside. John and Sherlock acted as though there was nothing to fret over, but then they were *John and Sherlock.* What would leave anyone else (i.e. Harry) in a useless mess of jittery nerves didn't faze them after years of exposure to danger. Sherlock retorted there was no point in worrying, for there was nothing at all for them to do. John exhorted him to set the whole thing aside, because if it was going to happen *anyway,* worrying about it wasn't going to help.

However, Harry couldn't help but work his brain to the point of exhaustion asking questions that he couldn't answer: Who made the prediction? How did Mr. Shin know it was real? Was Pettigrew a Voldemort supporter? How could any of his birth father's friends turn out to be Voldemort supporters? How did James Potter become friends with such a fiend, who willingly lived as a rat for *twelve years* to hide from the law?

Then sometime late in the afternoon, Harry remembered something. He pushed his books aside from his trunk and quickly found what he was looking for-the leather-bound photo album Hagrid made for him a year and a half ago for his birthday, which was full of wizard pictures of his biological mother and father. He sat down on his bed, checking his door to make sure it was locked, and started turning the pages, searching, until…

He stopped on a picture of his parents' wedding day. There was his father waving up at him, beaming, the untidy black hair Harry had inherited standing up in all directions. There was his birth mother, alight with happiness, arm in arm with his dad. And *there*… that must be him. Their best man… Harry had never given him a thought before.

If he hadn't known it was the same person, he would never have guessed it was Black in this old photograph. His face wasn't sunken and waxy, but handsome, full of laughter. Did he have any inkling he was facing twelve years in Azkaban, twelve years that would make him unrecognisable, for a crime he didn't commit?

Nothing we do will ever make it alright, Harry thought, recalling John's words, as he stared at the handsome, laughing face. *Sirius will never get those twelve years back, and he's probably going to need* years *of therapy just to sort-of get over his Azkaban experience…*

Harry imagined what it *might've* been like, if the mess didn't happen. The years he *might've* had instead of the nine years he had with the Dursleys, if Sirius Black hadn't been framed. He had a vague notion of a happier childhood, raised by his godfather. Then he invariably wondered if he would've still met Sherlock and John if that were the case. In all likelihood: no. He would've been raised all Magic, like Ron or Neville probably, not even knowing what Muggles were really like. Harry meant it when he said he didn't want to leave his current home. He would never trade the four years he'd spent with John and Sherlock. It wasn't like he *could* . But.

But…

You mean that it would have turned out all right-somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?

To know what would have happened, child? No. Nobody is to ever told that.

Oh dear.

But anyone can find out what will *happen* .

A rooster crowed.

Harry closed the album, pulled out his M-mobile phone and pressed the home button.

"Hi, Harry, how was your brooding day?" said Julia lightly.

Harry snorted, "Giving me brooding periods, are you?"

"You do like your breathing space when something upsetting happens. Why are you like my Dad?"

"I didn't know your Dad had brooding periods. He's so laidback most of the time. Okay, he busts a vein when he deals with Sherlock, but that's everyone."

"Ellen gives him two hours to stew and afterwards all bets are off; she's in full roaring: 'TellMeEverything *Now* '."

Harry laughed. "You gave me a whole day."

"I figured you needed a longer time. But that's *it* . There're too many things I'm dying to tell you: Like how Ron was freaking out over letting Pettigrew sleep in his *bed* ."

Harry laughed again.

Inside the Leaky Cauldron's private parlour, a broad, square-jawed witch with very short grey hair, thick eyebrows and a monocle, and a tall, bald black wizard wearing a single gold hoop earring were sitting on armchairs. The witch, Amelia Bones, checked her pocket watch repeatedly, while the wizard, Kingsley Shacklebolt, remained calm.

"Are you sure he knows how to get here?" asked Madam Bones in a booming voice.

"Yes, ma'am," said Kingsley in deep slow voice that exuded confidence.

"And we can trust him?"

"Absolutely. Lestrade is the only reason why I haven't had to contact the Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee for the Embalmer case."

"How did he explain away the potions and the bodies?"

"He told his superiors that it is evidence that the murders have occultist roots."

Madam Bones nodded in approval. "We get a lot of mileage out of that one. Good thinking of him. What more can you tell me about Lestrade?"

"This is strictly off-record, but I suspect he is a wizard who had 1962 syndrome," said Kingsley.

Madam Bones' monocle almost fell out.

" *1962* you say? Why wasn't he verified? And how do you know he's a wizard?"

"Muggle-repelling charms don't work with him, and all of his children have magic, despite having three different mothers, two of them Muggles. As for why he wasn't verified, Lestrade was born *after* 1962, so he can't have been affected by the *Incident* of 1962. Still, he grew up without knowing he is a wizard or showing any signs of magic until recently. I did some digging around on his background and all accounts point to him having a very difficult childhood after his mother left him in the care of an old Muggle woman who probably wasn't his actual grandmother."

Madam Bones pursed her lips. "In short, he may resent our kind for abandoning him."

"He tolerates magic, but asking him to testify as a *wizard* may be too much."

"I see. Thank you, Kingsley. I'll keep this in mind when I talk to him."

Bones and Kingsley waited for another ten minutes. Then a middle-aged man, silver-haired, tall and handsome, and wearing a Muggle

suit entered the room.

"Sorry, had a meeting with the Super," he said gruffly. "Hello, I'm Detective Inspector Lestrade from Scotland Yard."

"Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement," said Madam Bones, shaking his hand. "You already met Kingsley, of course."

"Yes, how do you do," said Lestrade, bowing.

They sat down.

"My Super already kicked the Sirius Black case back to the Home Office," said Lestrade without any pleasantries. "I expect our Prime Minister will talk to your Minister soon."

"The Minister will certainly have to talk to him," said Madam Bones grimly. "Can you show us the film footage?"

Lestrade shook his head. "I can't take the video out of the office or make copies. More than my job's worth."

Madam Bones and Kingsley looked disappointed, but not entirely surprised.

" *But* I can show you some interesting screenshots," said Lestrade, grinning.

Lestrade opened the locked briefcase he was carrying and showed Madam Bones and Kingsley several CCTV footage stills. The first one showed the grainy image of Pettigrew and Black facing each other, from a camera that was located on top of a pole at the left side of a street, a few paces behind Black. The second still showed Pettigrew had his wand hand behind his back and Black pulling out his own wand. The third footage showed an explosion happening right behind Pettigrew, and Black's wand tip showing no signs of emitting a spell. The fourth still showed Pettigrew, alive but without a finger. The fifth and final still only had Black standing with his back still facing the camera and staring at the giant crater in front of him.

There was a stunned silence.

"How did you get this?" asked Madam Bones weakly.

"The UK has more cameras per person than in any other country in the world," said Lestrade. "Footages like these are kept in the archives longer. So it was a matter of finding out where and when to look for."

"So Muggles have had footages like these since *2000* ?"

"Starting 1994, actually."

Madam Bones groaned. "The Ministry only started to do something about security cameras in 200 *2* ."

"My non-magic government probably knows all about you guys, yeah," said Lestrade sardonically. "They just haven't done anything about it because it's too *troublesome* ."

Madam Bones groaned again.

"We'll have to deal with this issue separately, Madam Bones," said Kingsley. "Let's focus on Pettigrew for now."

Madam Bones nodded as she gathered herself.

"Kingsley, tell all hands to start looking for Peter Pettigrew as *prime suspect* . Then look through the archives and see if we still have Black's old wand in storage. If you do, verify Black's last curse *isn't* the Blasting Curse. We don't want to botch this up."

Kingsley nodded curtly.

"My sincere thanks on behalf of the Wizarding World, Mr. Lestrade," said Madam Bones, shaking Lestrade's hand firmly. "I hope we haven't put you in a difficult position."

Lestrade shrugged. "Ask the Prime Minister if you need more help."

"We may have to ask you to testify in court. The Muggle victims need a voice," Madam Bones added cautiously.

"I know what you're doing," Lestrade growled. "You're not going to

convince me with that argument."

"My apologies," said Madam Bones immediately.

Lestrade shook his head ruefully.

"I don't- hate your world, you know. I've lived long enough to know that life has the good and the bad. You wizards aren't saints and your world ain't a utopia. I get that. I'll testify if you need me to, but don't ask me be one of you. I *can't* ."

"I understand. But to let you in our courts, we need to prove you're a wizard. Have you been fitted with a wand?"

Lestrade sighed, "Too wizard for my taste and a bit hard on the family budget."

"Is your father-in-law willing to impart his secret of wandless magic?"

"He is, and I asked, but he said his method of doing magic requires twenty years of training, two years minimum per spell, and a lot of book studying. Book-learning is not my strongest suit."

Kingsley smiled ruefully. "Maybe you're from an old wizard family and have some inheritance due."

Lestrade scoffed at the idea. "Knowing my luck, I'll just end up with a lot of family debt."

"I'll tell you if there is. What's your full name?"

"I'm assuming you want the one I had to grow up with and got beaten up by neighbourhood kids for."

"That sounds promising."

Lestrade laughed hollowly before answering: "Rogerius Gregory Lestrange."

Lestrade waited for a response.

When it wasn't forthcoming after a full minute, he tried waving a

hand.

"Hello? Anyone in there?"

Final Notes : I am a very evil person.

I was originally going to assign Sirius's case to Kingsley, but he's working on the Embalmer case now, and I figured Kingsley *volunteered* to take over Sirius's case post-GOF, and the previous lead Auror was more than happy to shift off the responsibility after Sirius evaded capture for two years. So I gave Sirius's case to Dawlish. Dawlish, though a very capable Auror, was *expecting* Barty Crouch Sr. to show up, and when he did, he was caught by surprised when the Imperiused Crouch stunned him. Shin left because he *finally* got the message from Dumbledore about Trelawney's second real prediction and went to do his job of recording the prophecy. Alas.

I couldn't resist quoting The Chronicles of Narnia, Prince Caspian

Exactly one year ago today, I posted the first chapter of A Study in Magic. I cannot believe I produced ***39*** *chapters* since then. Goodness.

Caring Inspiration

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backward to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty: Caring Inspiration

February was dawning in Hogsmeade. As the earnest and hardworking residents were yawning and groping for their morning brew, they blearily looked outside their windows to watch the new spectacle that spiced up their village. As the sun brightened the sky above the rooftops into a dusty pink, a man wearing a swamp-coloured T-shirt and fluorescent blue trousers, climbed out of the top window of the Three Broomsticks and vaulted up to the roof. Visibly steaming the frigid winter air around him, the man stood, perfectly poised and motionless, and gazed over the horizon with an empty longbow in his hand.

Flying specs appeared from a distance. Once they got close enough to be identified as Post-owls, the man made a drawn archer's pose. His bow bent obligingly, despite lacking a bowstring. He released, and a thick beam of light shot out and flew toward the owls. The beam divided into hundreds of small clusters of light beams mid-way. The light beams went through the owls harmlessly but ignited some of the letters they bore like miniature fireworks. But when the smoke cleared, the post appeared intact.

The man sent several flurries of these lights until it went through all the owls and their post. Then he waited for the owls-twenty plus in

number on that particular day-to settle around him so he could collect the mail. Once he filled his bag with post and the owls took flight again, the man swung back into the Three Broomsticks through the top window like a gymnast.

Inside an airy studio that had a kitchenette, the man- Robert by name- slapped on a headset connected to a glass case that looked like a touchscreen mobile phone, except emerald-green flames were burning inside it, and called out a name.

"Hey Tim," said Robert once the phone clicked.

" *Bob!* 'Sup, brutha?" a voice replied.

"I'm good. How's the baby?"

"He's good. Healthy, eating well and sleeping well; can't ask for more."

Robert smiled as he sat before a small oak desk. "Awesome."

Tim and Robert chatted as the latter sorted through a small mountain of mail. Envelopes were sliced open with surgical precision, their contents were scanned rapidly and then put into different piles, one made entirely of empty red envelopes. Only two bits of mail needed more than ten seconds; one contained undiluted Bubotuber-pus, thus required the use of Dragon-hid gloves, and the other contained a long, scathing letter from an old witch from Bath, who felt insulted when she didn't receive a proper letter (handwritten on parchment) in response to her complaint.

"So how are you calling me, I thought phones just blow up on you," asked Tim.

"The UK has a phone that doesn't."

" *Sweet* . And how is England?"

"Scotland, actually," said Robert as he contemplated the long letter. "Feels like I'm living in a perpetual Ren Fest."

"Is that a good thing?"

Robert shrugged. "The villagers are friendly, no one stares, the indoor plumbing scares the living daylights out of me and the food is *British* ; thank God for kitchenettes. I love my boss and my temp job is awesome."

"Your Facebook status said you played Halo 3 at work for three hours. What kind of job is it?"

"My title is customer service rep, but I only have to do customer service-y things ten minutes a day. The rest, I'm idling about or helping the boss with her funny side projects or playing video games with her."

"And you get paid full-time for it. That's sick, man."

"Honestly, I wouldn't have even gotten the job if the boss was allowed to hire non-magic people and she had fewer scruples about hiring students."

"What does the company do?"

Robert grinned. "It makes phones that don't blow up on me."

" *What!* ?"

Robert explained the Magical Mobile Network at great length while painstakingly constructing replies using pre-typed responses on a laptop with the hunt-and-peck method of typing. After ensuring he got all the recipient names right and the font had the appropriate script-like look, he fed a long roll of ironed parchment into an ancient printer and printed the letters. He then cut and enclosed all the letters into parchment envelopes, stuffed the whole lot into a drawstring bag, opened a window and hurled the bag into the Post Office's open window.

"Basically it's like the iPhone, only magic," Robert concluded as he dusted his hands. "Connecting to the regular wireless telecom network is a recent development. No idea how my boss did it; I just remember donating a bit of blood one day and *boom*, it worked."

" *Cool* . So when are you coming home?"

The smile on Robert's face faded at the question. He paused at the kitchenette, where a saucepan was shimmering something over an open fire.

"… I don't know," Robert replied at length.

"You okay, man?"

Robert made a non-committal noise.

"The kids miss you. Ben called me, like, ten times, asking me how you're doing."

"I'm just *tired*," Robert sighed as he picked up a chef's knife. "I'm really burnt out."

"Guest surgeon gig didn't help?"

"No, I met my ex after the first month."

"Ouch . "

"And check this out: *she married Sherlock Holmes and adopted Harry Potter.* "

Robert pulled out carrots, potatoes, and onions from the root cellar while Tim digested this statement.

"… That's not funny, Bob."

"You know humor and I have been violently estranged since birth."

"I still think you're lying. And isn't Sherlock Holmes having an epic Bromance with Dr. John Watson?"

"My ex *is* Dr. John Watson. She changed her name from Hailey to John."

"Seriously, stop lying, you're not funny. Anyway, is that why you're hiding out in Scotland? Does *that* help?"

"It's nice being helpful."

"You're always helpful."

"I'm always *useful.* Not the same thing."

The phone was silent for another spell. Robert used the time to chop up root vegetable matter in blinding speeds.

"I do miss the states," Robert admitted as he dumped the chopped veggies into a bowl. "The atmosphere is… dark and oppressive here; sometimes literally."

He paused as a tall, black hooded figure glided by from the street below, leaving a rattling chill in its wake. A great multitude of creatures just like they were guarding the entrance of a large castle looming tall in a distance. Robert's eyes lingered on the castle for several heartbeats before he turned his attention back to his current abode.

"I'll head back when the gig is over," he promised. "I have to go back pretending to work. Talk to you later."

"Sure. Good to hear from you, brutha. See ya."

The burning emerald flames inside the glass case shrunk down to pea-size. Robert sighed deeply through his nose. Then he resumed cooking. After filling a bento box and wrapping up it up in a patterned handkerchief, Robert walked over to the wheeled Samsonite luggage bag in the corner. He pondered over the enormous selection of clothes tucked inside by magic. After seriously considering a suit that looked as though it was sewn up after turning a mirror into a piece of cloth and a brown see-through sequined shirt, he picked a pair of baggy cropped trousers, a rainbow cardigan, and a woolly hat that had many different coloured stripes.

Thus dressed- *without* bothering to remove his knitted footwear- Robert got ready for his day.

Meanwhile, in Hogwarts castle, all the Hogwarts teachers were ensconced inside the staffroom. Ostensibly, it was to discuss the

latest news regarding Sirius Black. Remus Lupin, for one, seriously doubted this was the real reason.

"No sign of him?" asked Dumbledore gravely.

"No, professor," Hagrid replied, equally gravely. "No sign of big black dogs either."

Dumbledore sighed. "I rather hoped Sirius would reveal himself on his own accord by now."

The look of deep loathing on Snape's face said he'd rather the Dementors find Sirius first. This didn't surprise Remus one whit. Snape had been simmering with rage since the *Daily Prophet* announced Sirius innocent of killing thirteen people with a single curse. Remus himself reeled at the news, which he received from Dumbledore right after the full moon on December. The two weeks following the announcement were among the happiest in his life; confessing Sirius' status as an illegal Animagus, his continued failure to master the cloning spell and the harrowing experience of teaching Harry the patronus charm did little to abate it. Only when Sirius failed to turn himself in, despite the *Daily Prophet* running weekly articles about him, did Remus start to worry again.

"What about you, Jacqueline?" asked Dumbledore.

Jacqueline reported negative. Perhaps it was Remus' imagination, but she looked… not healthy, but *healthier* .

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "You will continue to look for him but NOT approach him when you're at Hogsmeade, of course?"

"Yes, sir," said Jacqueline, before looking at Hagrid pleadingly. "You really can't go today?"

Hagrid stared at the ceiling as he shook his shaggy head.

"Sorry, Jack. I promised Professor Kettleburn that I'd help him out with the… uh, flobberworms. Right, professor?"

"Yep!" boomed Kettleburn, too loudly.

Jacqueline narrowed her eyes as everyone else muttered their excuses. Sinistra elbowed Remus hard in ribs before he could say anything. Hagrid then used his bulk to prevent Remus from leaving the staffroom before all the other teachers trooped out with the exception of Dumbledore, who remained seated.

Jacqueline let out a long suffering sigh as the room emptied far too rapidly. Then she made a call.

"Hi, Robert. Do you have a way to go from Hogwarts to Hogsmeade without passing through the main gate?"

There was a pause. Then a slit appeared in the room and a very oddly dressed man stepped halfway out from the narrow aperture. He appeared to be around Remus' age, but his athletic build and thatch of tawny hair peeking out from his stripped hat him made Remus feel ancient in comparison. It actually took a couple of seconds to realise the man was Robert; his handsome face, which showed his mixed heritage plainly, was obscured behind a pair of rectangular purple sunglasses.

Jacqueline took one look at him and let out a tiny noise of distress.

"Robert," she said, " *What are you doing?* "

"You said you wanted to go to Hogsmeade without passing through the main gate," said Robert.

"I didn't mean right now!"

Robert grinned. "I know; just wanted to know if this was okay. Is it?" the last question was directed at Dumbledore.

"Interesting," said Dumbledore. "I've only heard about this spell. Portals, I believe they are called?"

"Yep," said Robert as he peered around the staffroom with great interest.

"I wonder how you came to learn this spell, when it is almost exclusively practiced by Healers in America, from which you clearly come from judging from your accent."

"I used to work in Healthcare," Robert replied easily.

Dumbledore peered over his half-moon glasses. "In what capacity, may I ask?"

"The operating theater; wizards and witches balk at the idea scalpels, you know. So we use portals instead."

"That doesn't quite answer my question," Dumbledore pressed.

Robert was blinking at the headmaster as he mustered his next answer, presumably, but Jacqueline interrupted him.

"Are those *knitted crocs*, Robert?" she burst out, as though she couldn't hold in the question any longer.

"Uh…"

"Your shoes look like knitted crocs," said Jacqueline, staring in frank horror at the green woolly ankle boots on Robert's feet. " *Don't you know crocs are never acceptable as footwear?* "

"… They're warm?" Robert offered.

"Furthermore, Robert, your hat is rainbow, but it *differs* in rainbow-ness from your rainbow cardigan. Nobody should ever wear clashing rainbows, Robert!"

Robert wisely kept his mouth shut.

"Why do you even own cropped trousers, are you trying to make yourself look like a Hobbit?" Jacqueline demanded.

Robert's silence was resolute.

"And… and… your purple sunglasses… ! *Why*, Robert?"

Silence reigned from all quarters after the pained question.

It was Robert who broke it.

"Here, boss, have a bento," he said brightly, shoving a package wrapped in a paisley-patterned cloth into Jacqueline's numb hands.

"You like AZN-style curry right?"

Jacqueline didn't answer. Robert grinned boyishly.

"Pick you up at four?"

"… Yes, thank you."

Robert winked and stepped back inside the aperture. The rip sealed itself shortly afterward.

Disquiet reigned for a span of a half-minute.

Then Dumbledore made a remark:

"So *he* is your one and only fulltime employee."

"He's usually not that bad," Jacqueline sighed. "My customers adore him. Sometimes they call just to hear him speak."

"And yourself?"

Jacqueline scowled. "I find him difficult to hate because he weirdly reminds me of my sister, Ceci."

"They do appear to share the same adventurous sense of fashion," said Dumbledore.

Jacqueline cringed at the comment.

"Heartwarming nostalgia aside," said Dumbledore, turning sombre. "How is he, really? Though I realise many Americans are far more informal than us, he appears to be taking great liberties from you."

"Oh, you don't have to worry about him!" said Jacqueline immediately. "I know he's weird, but he's not weird in a bad way. He always keeps a respectable distance of two feet, and-" she started to blush, "-I knew I could trust him implicitly when he refused to stay alone with me in a closed room. He hasn't deviated once."

That sounded old-fashioned to Remus. "Isn't that cumbersome?" he asked.

Jacqueline shook her head. "I appreciate the effort to stay above reproach."

"Still," said Dumbledore sombrely. "I would rest more easily if you moved your base of operations to Hogwarts. Please realise that I speak out of concern for your wellbeing, and not from any lack of confidence in you or your ability to work."

"But I can't use school resources for personal business!" Jacqueline protested.

"You *can* ."

"That doesn't mean I should!"

"That alone informs me that you will conduct business in a worthy manner," said Dumbledore, beaming. "Listen to me, Jacqueline: you have no idea how many students have been enriched by your entrepreneurial venture. There are things one simply cannot learn from a classroom, and you gave it to them willingly. I, for one, appreciate what you have done for them and wish you continue to do so."

Jacqueline stared at her lap, burning pink up to her ears.

"We can discuss the details separately, but do say yes," said Dumbledore.

"Okay," said Jacqueline to her hands. "Just, um, only if the school governors and parents are okay with it…"

"Of course. Most excellent! Let us discuss the particulars tomorrow evening when we will both have time."

Jacqueline bowed herself out of the room after this. Remus was about to leave, too, but Dumbledore raised a hand.

"One moment, please, Remus. I have something to speak with you."

Remus slithered back down to his seat, feeling apprehensive.

"I merely wished to talk about your private lessons with Harry," said

Dumbledore, clasping his hands. "How is it going along?"

Remus felt the tension leave and ruefulness take over.

"He can create an indistinct Patronus for about a handful of minutes until he succumbs to the Boggart-Dementor's influence," Remus replied. "He doesn't stay catatonic, though. He wakes up immediately when I shake him."

Dumbledore nodded. "So there has been a good deal of progress."

"I've told him as much, but Harry is still frustrated at his current rate of progress."

"We can be so impatient during our youth. But now I must digress. Do you have any fresh thoughts on where Sirius could be hiding?"

"No. Sorry, Headmaster," said Remus, looking down.

"No need to apologise for the lack of inspiration, seeing as they are such a rare and endangered species of thought," said Dumbledore ruefully. "You will tell me if something hits you?"

"Yes, of course."

"On a related note, I think the Minister of Magic is starting to warm up to the idea that Sirius' innocence in *one* particular crime could also mean he is innocent in regards to another."

Remus looked up hopefully. "Really?"

"The two crimes *are* deeply related," said Dumbledore. "And, unlike certain individuals, he doesn't have a predisposition to view Sirius as guilty by default."

Like Snape, Remus thought passionately. "You're optimistic."

"Cautiously so; Fudge seemed quite amenable to correcting, I quote, the mistakes of the previous administration."

Blame shifting, in other words. "What about the court case?"

"Grandmaster Shin informed me that he'd finally found a solution to the problem of validating the key witness."

"You mean he found a way to show the Wizengamot that Mr. Lestrade is a wizard?" asked Remus.

"Oh yes," said Dumbledore. "I hope to get the full story soon. It promises to be quite the tale."

Remus nodded happily. "Anything else, sir?"

"Only one more thing, if you may so indulge me."

"Certainly."

Dumbledore leaned forward with his hands still clasped under his chin. His bright blue eyes were sparkling in a way that filled Remus with a sense of presentiment.

"I believe there is an adage," Dumbledore started, "that says when one shares sadness it is halved, but when one shares happiness it is doubled."

Remus stared at him.

"Perhaps this would help you give Harry the extra nudge he needs," said Dumbledore.

The final Thursday lesson before the Ravenclaw versus Gryffindor match arrived far too soon for Remus' likening. Dumbledore's advice bounced around his mind whenever he let it wander, which wasn't conducive to effective teaching. Sound though it may be, asking what was one's happiest moment could come across as very intrusive and personal to someone like Harry, especially considering *what* his happiest memory would be. However, Remus couldn't help but guilty wish for Harry to confide it to him.

At eight o'clock on Thursday evening, both Harry and Remus found themselves in the History of Magic classroom once more.

"Ready?" asked Remus, grasped the lid of the packing case.

Harry nodded as he stared at the case with his wand out and a look of determination on his face.

Remus nodded back as he pulled the lid. A Dementor rose slowly from the box, its hooded face turned toward Harry. The lamps around the classroom flickered and went out. The Dementor stepped from the box and started to sweep silently toward Harry, drawing a deep, rattling breath. A wave of piercing cold broke out-

" *Expecto patronum* !" Harry yelled.

A huge, silver shadow came bursting out of the end of Harry's wand, to hover between him and the Dementor. It stood there like a semi-transparent cloud, neither forming shape nor form, but not retreating either. Remus started to count as Harry kept bellowing the incantation as his knees slowly gave away, his face turned paler a second at a time, and his eyes slid in and out of focus.

" *Riddikulus* !" roared Remus, springing forward when Harry almost doubled over.

The Dementor transformed into a small full moon. The vaporous Patronus vanished in its wake. Remus forced the Boggart back inside his suitcase as Harry heaved on the floor as though he'd run many laps around the outer edges of the castle.

"Still not good enough," Harry grumbled furiously. "I'll never make a good one for the match on Saturday."

"You're expecting too much of yourself," said Remus sternly. "For a thirteen-year-old wizard, even an indistinct Patronus is a huge achievement. You aren't passing out anymore, are you?"

"I thought a Patronus would- charge the Dementors down or something," said Harry dispiritedly. "Make them disappear-"

"The true Patronus does do that," said Remus. "But you've achieved a great deal in a very short space of time. If the Dementors put in an appearance at your next Quidditch match, you will be able to keep them at bay long enough to get back to the ground."

"You said it's harder if there are loads of them."

"I have complete confidence in you," said Remus, smiling. "Here- you've earned a drink. Something from the Three Broomsticks. You probably had some already."

He pulled two bottles out of his briefcase.

"Butterbeer!" said Harry, brightening up. "Yeah, I like that stuff!"

Remus smiled. "Well-let's drink to a Gryffindor victory against Ravenclaw! Not that I'm supposed to take sides, as a teacher…" he added hastily.

They drank the butterbeer in silence until Remus decided to take the plunge.

"I've been given some advice on the Patronus charm," he started. "Would you like to try it?"

Harry looked up immediately. "Yeah! What is it?"

"It's just a simple question. But it might make you uncomfortable. You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

"Okay," said Harry, looking very curious.

Remus hesitated for another second before asking:

"What is the happy memory you're concentrating on when you cast the Patronus charm?"

Remus watched Harry shrivel under the weight of his embarrassment. His entire body seemed to sink lower into his chair as his eyes went downwards and as he turned red.

"As I said before, you don't have to answer," said Remus quickly. Then an inspiration hit him. "Would you like to know what I think it is?"

Harry peered up. He stared at Remus for a moment, considering. Then he nodded.

"I think it is the day you were adopted," said Remus.

Harry's cheeks turned deep-red again. Remus waited as Harry fumbled around for words.

"I did focus on that the first time," Harry admitted. "But… it didn't work that well. So I thought of something else."

"What is it?"

Harry looked down again. "It's kind of stupid."

"I can't imagine it would be stupid if it lets you summon a Patronus," said Remus earnestly.

Harry hesitated for a long moment before he haltingly started to speak:

"A few weeks after my… Muggle parents started to foster me, my mum took me to a walk down Northumberland Street. The manager of the Italian restaurant we go to, he said hi and asked her who I was."

Harry paused again. He worked on his jaw several times before the next part stumbled out:

"She said, 'This is my son, Harry.'"

Tears sprung to Remus's eyes and the deep inner parts of his nose tingled. His hand flew to his mouth as he struggled to control himself, a difficult feat for he suddenly found it almost impossible to breathe through the tightening of his throat.

"… That's a *beautiful* memory," Remus somehow managed to say.

Harry smiled, looking more embarrassed still.

"I guess she and Sherlock noticed how much I liked it. Because they kept doing it. When he took me to Barts for the first time, Sherlock said 'my son' to Dr. Stamford and Ms. Hooper. I caught my Muggle mum pointing me out at a school event, telling some parent 'my son'. And if anyone asks, they always say 'our son'."

"You have wonderful parents," Remus murmured.

Harry beamed. "I know."

They didn't talk after. Once they finished their butterbeer, he and Harry stood up for one last try for the night in silent accord.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Harry bellowed when the Boggart-Dementor rose out of the packing case.

And out of the end of his wand burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver animal. Remus screwed up his eyes, trying to see what it was. It looked like a lion of truly remarkable proportions. It prowled away from Harry, regarding the shrinking Dementor with its fangs bared, and then opened its jaws to emit a silent roar. The Dementor fell back immediately, retreating to the packaging case which Remus quickly shut.

The Patronus turned. It was shining brightly as the moon. It was coming back to Harry, its silvery mane bristling…

" *Aslan*," Harry whispered.

But as his trembling fingertips stretched toward the creature, it vanished.

Remus and Harry regarded one another in the silence that followed. They said nothing to each other.

There was no need to.

The Saturday morning Harry and his fellow Gryffindor Quidditch team members played against their Ravenclaw counterparts, DI Lestrade and Grandmaster Shin were having a private magic lesson, the former learning, and the latter teaching. Lestrade had an arrested look on his face as the paper charm he'd successfully created and used for the first time levitated a feather up in the air.

"I did it," he gasped.

"High-five," said Shin with a hint of pride.

Lestrade and Shin awkwardly tapped each other's palms. Lestrade quickly turned his attention back to the levitating feather, and Shin to the notes he was making.

"I like this way," said Lestrade. "It's like building stuff with Legos."

"I thought you would," said Shin. "But you realize that unlike a wand, you cannot cast spells spontaneously unless you carry around pre-constructed, un-activated paper charms on your person."

Lestrade nodded. "I'll probably want to keep around shield and tracking charms and make other stuff on the fly."

"Yes, that would be wise."

"Where did you find this method?"

"I took inspiration from Jewish wizardry," explained Shin. "There are people who have magic out there who, for whatever reason, decided not to follow mainstream magic practices. One of the biggest reasons is theology. Many magic people of Jewish descent have scruples against magic. Ultra-conservatives ban it entirely. Those of a more moderate stance has spawned a unique type of magical practice. They follow Kosher for potion-making, prohibit divination and interacting with the dead, including ghosts, and do not use incantations for spells, per Deuteronomy 18:11. Though paper charms are not unique to Jewish wizards, they are the only ones who do not invoke the name of a god, which is not surprising considering their monotheistic worldview and reverence towards the Unspoken Name."

Lestrade was fascinated. "What about Muslims?"

"The Quran says all magic is haraam-sin. But Muslim wizards follow the interpretation that the magic marked as 'haraam' is only limited to soothsaying and Astrology because those are the two forms explicitly mentioned. Thus all forms of divination are prohibited, but other branches of magic are allowed."

"Like the stuff in Arabian Nights?"

"The book reflects the general flavour of Islamic culture magic, but don't mistake the details for actual practices."

"Okay," then Lestrade asked the question that he'd wondered about ever since Julia told him the Hufflepuff House ghost was the Fat Friar. "What about Christians?"

"Probably the most problematic looking, considering their reputation for witch burning," said Shin. "When it comes down to it, the line in the sand is drawn based on the interpretation of Leviticus 20:13, Leviticus 19:26 and Deuteronomy 18:10-11-' *Do not practice fortune-telling or witchcraft* ', ' *there shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead.* '"

"Uh, that sounds pretty straightforward."

"Not as much as you think. You must not bring your linguistic bias when you interpret writings. Newer translations of Leviticus 20:6, made based on older and larger body of material, use the word 'necromancer' and 'medium' instead of 'witch'. As for 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery', I've seen it cross-referenced with Ezekiel 13:20: *I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds.* The magic band mentioned sounds suspiciously like soul wands. The 'witchcraft' that falls under prohibition thus has to do with idolatry, human sacrifice, and necromancy."

"I'm starting to see a pattern," said Lestrade thoughtfully. "Have nothing to do with the dead, don't kill people for magic, and no divination."

"Yes, the three Abrahamic sects of magic agree on that," Shin confirmed.

Lestrade scratched the back of his head. "I'm probably only saying this because I know less than nothing, and I honestly think they got it right, but it still feels like they're bending over backward to have

magic and their religion too."

Shin smiled, shocking Lestrade.

"Bending-over-backwards is better than the outright destruction of a worldview's foundation, which is what a Materialist faces," he said. "Mind you, I'm very sympathetic to the atheistic mood and way of thinking. But most brands of that worldview don't fit in a world where things other than that which is material exist-magic being one of the more blatant examples besides the Laws of Logic. One cannot deny the existence of magic any more than one can deny that the sun exists. No amount of disbelief will make magic cease to exist. Magic is part of the world, and as such, a witch or wizard must make sense of their own existence in the context of a worldview, whether religious or nonreligious. The Christians who possessed magic had to answer the question ever since the first band of followers of Jesus emerged in the first century. And they have. Believe it or not, it was the Christian wizards and witches who shaped the magic practiced in Europe and America today. They are the ones who, collectively, removed the old gods and goddesses from the magic practices of Europe and Rome, and started to study magic as a separate entity created and given to them as a gift by the only God, particularly during the so-called Dark and Middle-ages. You won't see that kind of flourishing of magic as a separate source elsewhere except in the Middle-east where Islam took root. Even now, there are people invoking the name of Agni to summon fire, Indra for lightning and Ariel for wind, despite the fact you are better off summoning them without."

Lestrade stared at his father-in-law.

"I personally find it sad that people here are fast turning away from such a fine heritage," said Shin. "But here I bore you again with tangential musings."

"You obviously thought about it a lot."

"I still do, and I'm turning a hundred and five this year."

Lestrade's eyes bugged out. "I thought you were in your sixties!"

"Wizards can live up to three times longer than non-Magic people."

That made Lestrade happy at first until he actually thought it through.

"… So I'm going to outlive Ellen?"

"Hopefully only a couple of decades. But I won't lie to you- it can be up to a century."

Lestrade stared at his feet.

"Something to remember before condemning all pureblood marriages and ideologies," said Shin quietly. "I think you're ready for your family history now. Brace yourself."

Lestrade prepared himself for the worst.

"Your father was probably Hamon Rhosier Lestrange."

" *Was*," Lestrade noted.

"He died many years ago," said Shin tonelessly. "He married Philomena Nott, and had two more sons since you, the lost Lestrange son, 'vanished' without a trace: Rodolphus and Rabastan."

"Where are they?"

"Azkaban."

"Cool. I have jailbirds for brothers. What did they get convicted of?"

"Are you sure you want to know?"

Lestrade glared at his father-in-law, who sighed and gave in.

"Killing and torturing Muggles; committing numerous unspeakable acts under the orders of Lord Voldemort as two of his most loyal supporters; driving a married couple, both of them Aurors, into permanent insanity via torture curse."

Lestrade laughed bleakly.

"So they were terrorists. Way to go, family. You know, whoever said your life doesn't get any harder than your teenage mum abandoning you in her stepmother's care in South East Peckhem was an *Idiot.* "

"Don't call yourself an idiot. At least your grandmother didn't try to make a soul wand out of you at age nine."

"I stand corrected. Anything else I need to know?"

"Rodolphus married a woman from another old wizard family: Bellatrix Lestrange, nee Black."

"Wait, that name sounds familiar. Wasn't she a Voldemort supporter, too?"

"One of the most fanatically loyal."

"Yep, might as well have all of your family members be terrorists. Is there any good news? Besides the fact that being abandoned was one of the best things that ever happened to me, I mean."

A curious expression spread across Shin's face. Lestrade couldn't decipher it. He'd never seen his father-in-law make such a face before.

"As the oldest son of an old, pureblood wizard family," said Shin slowly, "you are entitled to the family estate and lion-share of the Lestrange family fortune. The latter should be in the Lestrange family vault in Gringotts Bank."

"Which is empty and have a lot of overdraft fees pending."

The strange expression on Shin's face grew. "I can guarantee you won't find any overdraft fees. The goblins haven't encountered the concept yet, and I'm not about to enlighten them. As for the contents of the vault, perhaps you should take a look yourself."

A few minutes later, Lestrade found himself inside Gringotts Bank, riding a tiny cart that had something called Clankers attached with his father-in-law and a *goblin* .

The cart twisted and turned through the labyrinthine passages,

sloping downward all the time. Lestrade couldn't hear anything over the rattling of the cart on the tracks. His hair flew behind him as they swerved between stalactites, flying ever deeper into the earth. They took a hairpin bend, and there, barring access to four or five of the deepest vaults in the place, was a…

"BLOODY HEEEEEEEELL!" Lestrade shouted as the cart fast approached a gigantic beast that was definitely a dragon, because there was no way in hell it wasn't. Scales, check. Lizard-like body with wings, check. *Breathing fire at them*, bloody double check.

Shin glared at him. "Shut up and keep your head down."

"WHY ARE WE CLANKING AT IT? *!* " roared Lestrade, not shutting up.

"Because it expects pain when it hears the noise," said the goblin. "Look-"

The cart advanced around the corner, shaking the Clankers, and the noise echoed off the rocky walls, grossly magnified, so that the inside of Lestrade's skull seemed to vibrate with the din. The dragon let out a hoarse roar, then retreated. Lestrade could see it trembling, and as they drew nearer he saw the scars made by vicious slashes across its face and guessed that it had been taught to fear hot swords when it heard the sound of the Clankers.

"Animal abuse," said Lestrade, very quietly.

"You should get together with Hagrid," said Shin sardonically.

The Lestrange Family Vault was one of the five the dragon was guarding. It had no keyhole.

"Stand back," said the goblin importantly. He stroked the door gently with one of his long fingers and it simply melted away.

"If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tried that, they'd be sucked through the door and trapped in there," said the goblin.

"How often do you check to see if anyone's inside?" Lestrade asked.

"About once every ten years," said the goblin with a rather nasty grin.

The goblin stood to the side at the opening. Shin gestured at Lestrade to climb out and take a look. Lestrade did so, expecting an empty vault or worse: a vault full of Voldemort propaganda material.

Then he stared. The cave-like opening was crammed from floor to ceiling with golden coins and goblets, silver armour, the skins of strange creatures-some with long spines, others with drooping wings-potions in jewelled flasks, and a skull still wearing a crown.

"All yours," said Shin, who was definitely smirking.

Lestrade stared at the family fortune for a long time. Then he turned to Shin.

"I think I should let you take care it. You know how stupid I am with money."

"I certainly don't want to see you do something foolish like buying another BMW."

Lestrade groaned. "You're never going to let me live that one down, are you?"

"Never," said Shin simply. "Speaking of which, let's get rid of that infernal car loan."

Final Notes : I wanted to write a lot of the stuff here in Chapter 35, but the plot wouldn't let me. I almost despaired of even covering it. But now I can! I have too much fun writing Robert and his hideous clothes. Did you know RDJ actually wears stuff like that?

A different Patronus for Harry. I hope you like it ;)

A Sense of Timing

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty One: A Sense of Timing

Albus Dumbledore was preparing to launch his final bird to decimate the pigs' fortress when Shin stepped into his office carrying a moke-skin pouch. Dumbledore hastily put his iPhone away, but forgot to lock it, thus the bird was launched as planned and noisily wrecked the computerized fortress of sticks and bricks.

Dumbledore and Shin stared at each other while the victory ditty played.

"… Angry Birds?" asked Shin blankly.

"It is an alarmingly addictive game," said Dumbledore, abashed.

"I know," said Shin, still staring. "At least you're addicted to a respectable game. I play Anipang."

Dumbledore tilted his head to the side in curiosity, but Shin didn't deign to enlighten him and instead sat on a chair on the other side of the headmaster's desk.

"The inheritance business went well, I take it," said Dumbledore.

"It did," said Shin. "Hamon Lestrange's will was traditional to the

letter, just as we hoped: ' *I do hereby bequeath all properties, Gringott's vault, land holdings, furnishings, and other residue of the Lestrange estate to my eldest wizard son, with a single exception: that he provide in gold the single payment of six thousand Galleons to all my younger sons who are wizards, which is to be divided equally among them.* ' It did not specify names. Thus Greg is the head of the Lestrange family and owner of the Lestrange family vault."

Dumbledore smiled. "Excellent."

"Greg actually wondered at how smoothly things went," Shin remarked. "I wondered myself. Why not specify his heir as Rodolphus? Why grant Greg a name that would make his relations to the Lestrange family so clear?"

"Yes, it's very curious, isn't it?" said Dumbledore, resting his elbows on the desk with his fingertips touching. "Philomena Lestrange was one of the victims of Incident of 1962. She was still fragile when she was pregnant with her first child. The pregnancy was fraught with complications- complications a Muggle woman may experience, but a witch would not."

"I know. I speculated aloud the most charitable extrapolation of the known facts: Philomena Lestrange wished her son born no matter what the cost. Thus she submitted herself to the care of muggle doctors who have experience treating her problems. Her son was born, but magic indicator test time and time again show the boy doesn't possess magic. Thus the boy was, per tradition, left to live in the Muggle world. But contrary to tradition, he was allowed to keep his name; a heartfelt wish of a mother for her son, that should he ever recover his magic and receive a Hogwarts letter, his name would tell him where to find her."

"A wish that didn't get fulfilled during her lifetime," said Dumbledore, shaking his head. "It is strange for me to think in these lines, but had Philomena loved him *more*, Greg may not be the good man he is today, and we would be facing an entirely different set of circumstances. You and I, for one, may not be having this conversation."

"In all likelihood, no," said Shin quietly.

There was a moment of silence.

"I found an interesting trinket in the Lestrange vault," said Shin abruptly.

Shin reached into his moke-skin pouch and pulled out a shining golden cup with two finely wrought handles on either side. There was a badger engraved on its surface. Dumbledore's eyes widened at the sight of it.

"Is this…?"

"A soul wand of sorts, yes."

"That is not what I meant," said Dumbledore, adjusting his glasses. "Did you notice the badger engraving? It is the symbol of Helga Hufflepuff and her house. This is her cup."

Shin sniffed. "You know I have no regard for relics."

"I would not ask you the impossible, my friend," said Dumbledore, looking very amused. "I did not mention this to draw your extremely reluctant attention to the historical significance and value of this cup. I merely informed you that this is Helga Hufflepuff's cup so I could tell you Lord Voldemort had *keen* interest in relics such as these, particularly anything that had to do with the Founders of Hogwarts."

"Ah," said Shin, "So I spoke too early, my apologies. This cup not only confirms our hypothesis Voldemort had split his soul into multiple fragments, but also tells us what kind of *vessels* Voldemort used to protect his soul fragments."

"Precisely," said Dumbledore. "Harry destroyed his diary and the soul fragment within it last year using Basilisk's venom. Now we have Hufflepuff's cup, which you say is a soul wand 'of sorts'. I assume you have tried to destroy it with your usual methods, but failed."

Shin pulled out a red paper charm from his inner coat pocket. Unlike his other paper charms, it lacked symbols.

"Soul wands are more powerful than regular wands, but the wand's vessel is only as powerful as the material it is made of. Transfer the soul to paper, then releasing the soul is a matter of tearing it. But this method did not work for this cup."

"I'm not surprised," said Dumbledore grimly. "For I suspect this cup is a *Horcrux* : the receptacle in which a Dark wizard has hidden a fragment of his soul for the purposes of attaining immortality. In many ways it is the reverse of a soul wand; the purpose of a Horcrux is to protect the soul it was given, thus the magic strengthens the container, but not the mutilated soul."

"Only the most destructive sort of magic could destroy it, then," said Shin thoughtfully. "I know a few such spells, but the feasibility of using them is-."

Dumbledore rose from his seat and walked over to the wall behind his desk. The patched and ragged Sorting Hat was standing on a shelf. A glass case next to it held a magnificent silver sword with large rubies set into the hilt. Dumbledore opened the glass case and retrieved the sword.

"The Sword of Gryffindor," explained Dumbledore. "One founder's relic I am certain Lord Voldemort did not manage to get his hands on. As a Goblin-made blade, it imbibes only that which strengthens them. When Harry, Neville and your granddaughter Julia used this sword to kill the Basilisk, it became impregnated with its venom."

"Venom powerful enough to destroy a Horcrux," said Shin in understanding. "What are we waiting for?"

Dumbledore grasped the sword's handle with both hands and pointed the sharp tip towards the gold cup on his desk. As if sensing it was in danger, darkness seemed to envelop the cup and it started to twitch.

"It is trying to resist," said Shin.

"Indeed."

Shin reached over and grasped the sword's handle. The aura

around him appeared to extend out to all directions. Soon the air inside the office felt as though it was full of static. A few visible crackles of light sparked mid-air. Even the portraits of the old headmasters and headmistresses sensed the charged atmosphere and watched with bated breath.

"Your power is something else," muttered Dumbledore.

"No more side-talk," growled Shin.

Together they drove the sword home.

Ten minutes later, the smoking, broken shards of the cup were swept unceremoniously into Shin's moke-skin pouch and Dumbledore and Shin were back in their original seats.

"If you have the time, could you explain to me the new magic you devised for your son-in-law?" asked Dumbledore.

Shin shrugged. "It's not really new. You'll recognise it."

"Ah, yes," Dumbledore leaned in to examine the paper charm Shin held up more closely. "Yes, I recognise the Sephiroth-like arrangement, but I also see the eight trigram pattern-quite ingenious. One can prepare them like paper charms, but can cast multiple spells by adjusting the position of the paper."

"I'm not satisfied with it," Shin demurred. "Greg's vocation is fraught with dangers and unexpected situations. He requires the kind of range a wand offers."

"Perhaps you can increase the number of subsections? I could see room for multiple subsections interacting with each other, perhaps shutting down sections not in use…"

"That would increase the real estate, and I want to keep each card as small as possible."

"I was thinking along the lines of folding in the subsections one does not need."

"Ah, so the subsections are arranged the octagonal pattern, and perhaps a flap of sorts to cover and block the parts that are not needed at the moment- but *wait* . I'm not certain if this would lead to too many dud patterns…"

When Professor McGonagall entered the headmaster's office to inform Dumbledore Ms. Jacqueline had started moving business operations (and employee) to Hogwarts, she found the Headmaster and the Grandmaster in their shirtsleeves, poring over a large diagram chalked directly on the floor. They were so immersed in their discussion they didn't even notice her entrance.

McGonagall left quietly without saying a word. After all, one shouldn't interrupt the work of intellectual giants.

Minerva was thinking nothing in particular when she headed back to the Music Chamber where Ms. Jacqueline was (re)establishing her base of operations. This state continued when she arrived there and saw a young man wearing a brown suit which he had unfortunately decided to wear on top of a black waistcoat, salmon coloured shirt, magenta tie and purple opera scarf and trainers. He was staring at his surroundings and the large heap of boxes and crates in a manner that suggested that he didn't know what to do with it or himself. Then he started opening the boxes and unloading their contents with magic without a wand in sight.

"Is that *wandless* magic?" said Minerva, unable to help herself.

The young man jumped, and the box full of M-mobile phones he was levitating dropped to the ground heavily. The glass cases scattered all across the marble floor.

"Oh, goodness, I'm so sorry," said Minerva as she pulled out her wand to recollect the glass phone cases.

"It's okay," said the man breathlessly. "I can do this. Oh, you've already done it. Thank you. Hi, I'm Robert, who are you?"

Minerva raised an eyebrow at Mr. Robert's graceless handling of the

conversation.

"I'm Professor McGonagall. I teach Transfigurations here."

"Hi."

Mr. Robert then walked towards to the rest of the boxes, failing to acknowledge Minerva's proffered hand. Minerva was just thinking how unspeakably rude he was when Mr. Robert backtracked gawkily and shook it.

"I'm so sorry, I'm really awkward," said Mr. Robert, batting his large tawny eyes.

Minerva deflated despite herself. "Are you nervous?"

"You have no idea… !" exclaimed Mr. Robert, excitement contorting his handsome face. "This is *Hogwarts* ! It's the gold-standard of magic education! The castle is older than the entire length of official American history! The closest thing to an enchanted castle America has is Disney and it's not even real! *How the loving heck did I get here* ?"

Minerva smiled as Mr. Robert continued to flail around like a little boy on his first visit to Honeydukes.

"Is it true there're merpeople living in the lake?" asked Mr. Robert, flapping his arms.

"Yes, there's a small community-"

"Centaurs and unicorns in the Forbidden Forest?"

"Yes-"

"What about Acromantulas *?* I heard there's a colony of them living nearby!"

"I suspect there is one-"

"And a pet Basilisk?"

"… Is dead, thankfully."

"Oh," said Mr. Robert in palpable disappointment, but his enthusiasm picked up again. "Do I have access to your library? Am I allowed to walk around? I swear I won't damage anything!"

"… Yes, and by all means," said Minerva, feeling slightly out of breath after the barrage of excitement. "Just be mindful that Hogwarts *is* a school, therefore there are classes in progress."

"Okay," said Mr. Robert, bobbing his head. Then more to himself, he muttered: "This is like a *dream*… !"

Mr. Robert eventually came back to his senses and started unloading the boxes and crates again. Minerva helped him. The crate she unloaded first had an immense quantity of wires and cables. Minerva asked Mr. Robert what she was supposed to do with it, and Mr. Robert just shrugged his shoulders helplessly, stating he and technology had a turbulent relationship. So they left them in a large heap on the floor.

As she moved the contents of the other boxes, Minerva asked Mr. Robert about the wandless magic he was performing.

"It's a way of magic that's on its way out," said Mr. Robert as he erected a five story rack by hand but summoning the needed tools with wandless magic. "Where I was born, there are basically five flavors of magic. The first is the shaman kind, which focuses on the dead and communion with spirits. Then there are the seers, focusing on divination. Then there are the charm makers and the court wizards, the latter mostly charged with monitoring the weather and crop growth of the nation. Then there're the monks and hermits who believed mastery in magic was directly related to achieving Nirvana or Enlightenment. I was raised in the last one."

"You weren't raised in America?"

"I got adopted by a nice couple in Maryland when I was nine," said Mr. Robert, scratching his neck. "My biological parents did the traditional thing and tossed me to the nearest Buddhist monk when they realized I had magic. Mind you, Shihon *biguni* didn't know what

to do with me either when she found me inside her *shiju* box."

Minerva stared at him. "That is-"

"Hilariously tragic, yes, but it happened all the time back then. Shihon *biguni* eventually found Han Bin *guhsa*, but he punted me back to her after two years. She then sent me to Doe Hae *seunim* and he tried to raise me into a monk, but-come on, can you imagine me a *monk* ?"

Minerva didn't even try.

"See? It doesn't work," said Mr. Robert. "Anyway, Han Bin *guhsa* and Doe Hae *seunim* taught me the only proper way to do magic is never letting it depend on *tools* . The only way to do *that* is cultivating your magic to the point your *body* becomes a wand."

Minerva frowned. "I don't follow you."

"For most magic people, their magic is just floating around inside their body, minding its own business, until an external wand focuses it," Mr. Robert explained. "Now what would happen if your whole body is *saturated* with magic?"

It clicked. "You essentially turn into a wand, where your magic acts as the core and your body the vessel. That's why it takes *decades* to properly do magic this way."

"And why bother when you can do magic more reliably and quickly with external wands?" said Mr. Robert. "I do magic wandless only out of necessity. If I don't, my magic either goes stagnant or explodes. But regular expenditure increases my magic capacity, so I end up having a little bit more to spend each time. It's a vicious cycle."

"… All of a sudden my father's body shrinking antics makes *perfect* sense," said a familiar voice.

Minerva and Mr. Robert looked back. A wide grin spread across Mr. Robert's face when his eyes landed on Ms. Jacqueline, who was impeccably dressed as always in her pressed white blouse, black suit, and boots. Unlike her usual self, she was frowning.

"Robert," said Ms. Jacqueline sternly. "Pairing a brown suit with a black waistcoat does not work. It *never* works. You need to stop trying. Please pick one colour and *stick to it.* "

"Hi, boss," said Mr. Robert, grinning. "You're looking very monochromatic today."

Ms. Jacqueline scowled. "You don't improve your brown suit with a salmon shirt and magenta tie. It doesn't work."

"If I didn't know any better, I would've thought you didn't know colors existed," said Mr. Robert cheekily.

Ms. Jacqueline's scowl increased. "Why is your scarf so purple? I'm starting to suspect purple is your favourite colour, Robert."

"I don't think I've ever seen you wearing something that *has* color. Boss, you know colors don't hurt, right?"

Minerva left soon after this, vaguely thinking Hogwarts had another odd addition to its residents.

In a few days, Minerva had a full appreciation of how correct she was.

The students were starting to talk about the mysterious madman who was prowling around the grounds carrying a longbow in the mornings, climbing the outer walls like a monkey, and shortcutting through the castle by leaping between the towers, windows, and battlements. Hagrid reported the centaurs in the forest were baffled at the 'new creature' that jumped through the treetops in speeds too fast for eyes to follow and Merchieftainess Murcus actually came up to the surface of the lake to ask about the person who kept swimming towards her village. Fred and George Weasley were determined to catch the man, but so far their efforts were in vain.

"Ms. Shin, restrain your help," snapped Severus after reporting his N.E.W.T. Potions students arrived late for class because they'd sighted Mr. Robert racing across the battlements and had tried to follow him.

Ms. Jacqueline shrugged artfully.

"Constant physical activity is the only thing that ensures his continued wellbeing, and he has the right to do what he pleases during his non-working hours as long as the Headmaster does not object."

She looked at Albus. "I certainly don't mind," Albus said, as though on cue.

Severus turned thin-lipped. "Surely the distraction he is causing to the students is-"

"One could say it is the *students'* responsibility to arrive promptly to class, no matter the distraction," argued Albus with a twinkle in his eye. "It is not as though Mr. Robert is a making a grand spectacle of himself."

"… You do not consider jumping from tower to tower a spectacle?"

"He does it quietly."

Severus stormed off after this. Thus Mr. Robert was allowed to continue his perilous physical activities in peace. Minerva and her other colleagues didn't worry about it at all-that is, they didn't until the first full moon of February occurred, by which time Ms. Jacqueline started to *join* Mr. Robert in his antics…

Ron waited until Hermione left the Gryffindor tower to meet up with Julia and Ginny to ask the question that had been burning inside him the whole afternoon to his other best friend, Harry Potter.

"Harry," he whispered urgently. "I might sound crazy, but… do you think Lupin is a werewolf?"

Harry blinked at him. "How d'you reckon?"

"I just realised he gets 'sick' on a monthly basis," said Ron meaningfully, "and only when there's a full moon. And when I had detention in the Hospital Wing back in November when Lupin was out sick, supposedly, he wasn't there. Besides, his Boggart is…"

"… A full moon," Harry finished. "Well, you're right. I asked him about it last year and he said yes."

Ron studied Harry's composed face. Then he closed his eyes. He should be used to Harry's breathtaking ignorance of wizard matters by know, but sometimes… it was too much.

"Harry," said Ron, very slowly. "Lupin. Is a *werewolf* ."

"Yes, so?"

Merlin's pants, it was like talking to an idiot. "They hunt and bite people specifically to make more werewolves."

"Yeah, it's really messed up," said Harry with quiet indignation. "I don't know how people managed before the Wolfsbane potion. Did you know someone actually tried to banish the moon to stop his son from transforming? It didn't work, obviously, but still. You can really feel for the man."

Ron gaped open-mouthed as Harry went on talking about the various ludicrous treatments for lycanthropy wizards and witches concocted over the years. Obviously he had taken the time to look them all up, which wasn't something Harry did unless he was stewing over an idea. That meant…

"Harry, are you trying to find a werewolf cure?"

"Kind of. I mean, I wasn't really thinking about making something new," said Harry, scratching his head. "The werewolf curse cuts down a wizard's lifespan easily by a third and ruins their health. Like that's not enough, gits like Snape treat them like they're nothing but rabid wolves no matter what the moon phase. That's not right."

Ron said nothing, but inside he felt an immense sense of relief. Harry going to such lengths to understand werewolves meant he felt very strongly about it, and Ron didn't fancy his best mate thinking he was a prat at the same level of *Snape*, who was Prat King, full stop. Anyway, Lupin was a very decent bloke, werewolf curse aside. Perhaps he overreacted.

"You reckon Hermione knows too?" asked Ron, scowling fiercely to

hide what he was really thinking. "The way she said the reason why he was out sick today was *obvious*…"

"I suspect so," said Harry, frowning. "Probably since Snape assigned the werewolf essay, but I figured Hermione wouldn't even hint at it."

"She can't help but show off when she knows something," said Ron knowingly. "Still, all that work she puts into her school stuff, earns her bragging points, eh?"

Harry snorted. "Julia works about as hard as Hermione does, and you don't see *her* showing off all the time."

Ron was about to argue back, but then Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas came over.

"Are you two talking about *girls* ?" said Seamus, grinning.

Ron and Harry stared as Dean and Seamus took seats at their table. "I guess?" said Ron, because they were. Sort of.

"I'm not sure about Julia Lestrade. She's not bad looking *now*, but you can tell how she's going to look like later from Ms. Shin," said Seamus.

"What's wrong with Miss Jackie?" asked Harry, frowning.

"She's way too skinny. Me, I like them blonde with a good amount of bosom, like Veronica Brocklehurst."

"I'm not sure about Brocklehurst, I think she pads up her bra," said Dean. "Now Padma and Parvati, *they've* got nice legs."

"You're right about the legs," said Ron, thinking about Amy Pond, "And the bosom. Women should be *curvy* . Madam Rosmerta, case in point."

Dean and Seamus murmured their agreement. "What about you, Harry?" asked Dean.

"I don't even know how you notice these details. I'm too busy

noticing the face and hands," said Harry, turning a bit pink.

"Face I can understand, but what is up with you and *hands* ?"

"I like them! What about you Neville?"

Ron, Seamus, and Dean looked up, startled. Sure enough, Neville was sitting at their table too. Neville turned bright pink under their scrutiny.

"Um… I like girls who are… nice and, um, doesn't mind that I can't remember stuff…"

Seamus and Dean gaped slightly, as though considering personality hadn't occurred to them at all. To be honest, Ron wasn't thinking about it either.

"Yeah, I don't like the catty ones."

"Don't think I could date someone who's stupid. How are you going to talk to them?"

"No nagging."

"Yeah, no nagging- definitely no nagging!"

Hermione paused to scratch the inside of her left ear before she resumed speaking to her friends, Julia and Ginny.

"So I think Ron is going to figure out Professor Lupin is a werewolf soon." Then she added, "About *time* ."

"Okay, that brings up the total number of people who know to four: us and Ron. Who else?" said Julia.

"I'm pretty sure Harry knows; he seemed to understand what I was hinting at when I was working on the werewolf essay back in November," said Hermione.

"Harry's been spending a lot of time with Lupin lately," said Ginny

thoughtfully. "Do you think it's related?"

"Maybe; he's been reading a lot of books about werewolves, too," Julia remarked.

"Well, recently it's been for Anti-Dementor lessons," said Hermione. "But I didn't know he was reading books about werewolves. How do *you* know, Julia?"

"I know because I couldn't get hold of those books," said Julia. "I checked the flyleaves after they were returned to the library, and the last person who checked them out was Harry each time."

"Why did you want to read them?" asked Ginny.

"I had this idea," said Julia. "Wouldn't it be nice if there was some kind of potion that stops the werewolf curse from taking hold to begin with? It would be like the smallpox vaccine."

Hermione was intrigued. But, "You know there's no cure for werewolves. It's virtually *impossible* to develop one because the curse seeps right into a person's magic and embeds itself into it."

"I know that *now*," Julia sighed. "It was just an idea…"

"Well, I don't know what you mean by vaccine, but I think the basic idea is good," said Ginny. "Who knows? You might find the cure!"

"But the idea sounds stupid, even in my own head," Julia mumbled.

"You already have an idea?" said Hermione, surprised. "Let's hear it, then."

Julia slowly caved under Hermione and Ginny's anticipatory gaze.

"Since the full moon triggers the curse," said Julia slowly, "wouldn't the curse fail to trigger if you make the curse, I don't know, *forget* that the moon exists?"

Hermione and Ginny stared without making any comment. Julia looked at their faces and drooped.

"I *knew* you were going to think it was stupid," she grumbled.

"I don't think it's stupid!" said Hermione hastily. "It's just… Julia, c'mon! Curses don't have *minds* that can forget things!"

"You might be onto something, though," said Ginny. "Removing the trigger, that's a good idea. It's a start."

"But how do you even start with that?" said Julia, pulling a face.

"You could ask Professor Snape," said Hermione.

Julia looked horrified. " *Hell*, nooooo!"

"But he's the Potions Professor and he likes you… kind of," said Hermione.

That only made Julia look even more horrified. " *Ew,* Hermione, are you even listening to what you're saying? To do that, I'll have to actually *ask* him!"

"Why not?" said Ginny. "All you need is a bit of nerve."

"And if by some miracle he actually *listens* and thinks it's worth trying, which I seriously doubt, I'll have to *work with him.* " Julia shuddered. "No. Just… *no.* "

They sat in silence for a while.

"Let's talk about something else," said Ginny. "Any boys you like?"

"Cedric Diggory is nice," said Julia. "I like that he's smart and thoughtful. He's way older though-four years is a bit too much for me. What about you Hermione? Anyone strike your fancy?"

"I'm too busy to think about boys," said Hermione loftily. "Do you have any idea how many classes I'm taking?"

"I think you're trying to do too much," said Julia.

"Yeah, even *Ron* is worried about you and your workload," said Ginny, grinning.

Hermione went red. "I don't want to worry about that kind of stuff right now! I can think about it later! Fourteen is too young to do anything about it, anyway! That reminds me, Ginny, how are *you* doing with you-know-what?"

Ginny turned bright pink as she let out a gusting sigh.

"I thought I was doing okay until you told me Harry found out Lupin was a werewolf about the same time as you. It's obvious he doesn't care Lupin is a werewolf, and he's even taking the time to get to know him! *Why so caring and bright, you life-ruiner* ?"

Hermione bit on her lower lip to stop her giggles, and Julia covered her mouth.

"How do *you* cope with your crush?" Ginny grumbled at Julia.

"Well, the thing I have for Cedric isn't really a crush since I just think he's a catch like everyone else," said Julia. "But for my *last* crush, I imagined him taking a huge dry dump: you can't say it didn't happen before and it makes him look a lot less perfect."

Hermione and Ginny giggled for a long time.

Harry headed to the Music Room for his evening violin lessons after escaping the long (and slightly harrowing) conversation about girls that ended in a fight inside the Gryffindor common room. Julia joined him about halfway there as usual.

"You have that preoccupied look," Julia said. "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing," said Harry. "I'm just ashamed to be a guy today."

"At least you have the sense to feel ashamed. What were the guys talking about?"

"You don't want to know," Harry muttered darkly. "What about you? Did you, Hermione and Ginny have a nice long Lupine discussion?"

Julia stopped for several shocked beats. Harry quietly sniggered at her expression, which was identical to the one Mr. Lestrade always wore when Sherlock did something outrageous and clever (again).

" *How did you know* ?" Julia hissed.

"Ron was asking me about Professor Lupin today, and he mentioned Hermione said the reason why he was sick is *obvious*," said Harry. "Hermione can't keep things herself when she knows something and she's pants at lying. I figured she was going to talk to you two about it because it was only a matter of time before Ron put two and two together. We're both keeping mum, by the way."

Julia rolled her eyes and sighed heavily. "I *knew* Hermione was too confident about hiding this from you to be true."

"Next time you three want to have a secret meeting, tell us you're off to have *girl talk* . We'll scarper off real quick," said Harry, grinning.

"I'll take that into consideration," said Julia dryly. "So why are you reading so many werewolf books?"

Harry blinked at her. Julia looked back balefully.

" *Someone* was hogging all the werewolf books and I wanted to know who," she said.

"Why did you want to read them?" asked Harry.

"The same reason why you want to read them: I wanted to look up werewolf cures," Julia replied.

Harry scratched the back of his head, "Any bright ideas?"

"Only stupid ones that make people laugh," Julia sighed.

"You mean Hermione and Ginny. At least you *have* ideas," Harry looked at her keenly. "So what is it?"

Julia told him her idea of vaccines and making the werewolf curse forget the full moon existed. Harry considered it. He had thought about vaccines, too, but he couldn't think how exactly it would work.

A vaccine that made the curse forget the moon wasn't completely beyond the realm of possibility.

"You should tell this to Miss Jackie," he concluded.

"I'd rather someone tell me my idea is stupid than to be too nice to say so upfront," said Julia, frowning. "So you don't think it's stupid?"

"No," said Harry. "One thing I learned from making the Holographic map is, as long as you're not violating the laws of logic and you're not messing around with life and death, you can make magic do almost anything." He knew it was so; Harry actually invented a few spells for the map, mostly because he was too lazy to look them up and see if they already existed. He mashed up plausible sounding Latin to create the incantation and, wonder of wonders, they worked. "Make a curse forget something-why not? Ask Miss Jackie if the idea has contradictions, and if it doesn't, go for it."

Julia turned very thoughtful as Harry opened the door to the Music Chamber.

Then the two of them stopped short. After blinking a few times, they rubbed their eyes and squinted again.

Miss Jackie was playing Halo 3 with a man wearing a pink suit that looked vaguely tartan in nature, a blue tie that had red and yellow floral patterns, a white shirt, jeans and purple accented footwear that looked a lot like the socks people who had foot fungus wore except they reached only to the ankles. The man incidentally looked a lot like Dr. Robert D. Ju, except he had a lot of scruff on his face and his hair was longer and curled around the back of his neck. Both the man and Miss Jackie looked back at Harry and Julia standing at the doorway, gobsmacked.

Then Julia pointed a finger at the man and shouted: " *YOU* ! You're that Dr. Robert Ju person!"

Miss Jackie lifted a well-plucked eyebrow at Dr. Ju, who looked slightly frozen.

" *Doctor* ?" she said.

Dr. Ju sighed. "I knew video games would be my downfall," he murmured.

"Why are you here?" Julia demanded.

"You two met before?" Miss Jackie asked again, rather mildly.

"In a hospital last summer," said Dr. Ju. "I reported a crime to her father."

"And you out-ed my dad as a wizard!" shouted Julia.

Both of Miss Jackie's eyebrows ascended. " *You* convinced my brother-in-law he has magic?"

"He's your *brother-in-law* ?" said Dr. Ju blankly.

"You didn't answer my question!" Julia shouted again.

"Just… don't mind me, I'm having an existential crisis," Dr. Ju muttered.

Julia opened her mouth again, but Miss Jackie raised a hand for quiet.

"I heard about you," said Miss Jackie calmly. "Your American passport says you're *Robert Ransom* because that's the name your adoptive parents gave you. Before you were adopted, your last name was listed as 'Ju' because you were found in a Buddhist donation box as a baby: the Shi *-ju* box. You go by 'Robert' in both the Muggle and Magic worlds because you like the name, and indeed both worlds know you best as *Robert Dongyi Ju* -genius healer."

Dr. Ju looked away.

"You lead a peripatetic life," Miss Jackie went on. "You have a reputation of staying at a hospital for two years max, but always leaving a deep impression wherever you happen to be. What you did between hospital jobs, no one knew. I never would've guessed customer service work, unless you are really serious about your existential crisis."

"I'm always completely serious," said Dr. Ju, very seriously.

Miss Jackie considered that. "' *I know I'm meant for service-oriented jobs, but after working sixteen years in the medical field, I've started to wonder if I would be more effective elsewhere.* '"

"You remember that?" asked Dr. Ju in wonderment.

"I had no reason to forget."

"Wow. I can only do that for medical stuff," said Dr. Ju, scratching the stubble on his chin. "So am I fired?"

"Why would I do that?"

"You're angry that I hid something from you," said Dr. Ju simply. "And it was a pretty big something."

"Of course I'm angry that you hid something from me," said Miss Jackie, raising an eyebrow again. "That's what people *do* ."

Dr. Ju blinked.

"For the same reason, I understand why you wanted to hide in the first place," said Miss Jackie gently. "I rather hoped you knew me enough to know I'd respect your boundaries and trust me not to cross them."

Dr. Ju frowned at Miss Jackie, as though she was speaking a half-intelligent foreign language.

"… You're funny," he said. "I've never met someone like you before."

"Likewise," said Miss Jackie serenely. "I don't think I've met someone who listens so much."

Dr. Ju's jaw fell open. "You-"

Miss Jackie rose to her feet, ignoring him. "It's time for me don my music teacher hat. Carry on, Robert."

"How can you trust him, Auntie Jack?" asked Julia inside a noise-

cancelling screen. "He's *weird*- freaky weird!"

"I know he's weird," said Miss Jackie. "It's hard to miss. Just look at his footwear."

"They're Vibram FiveFingers!" Dr. Ju shouted from the other side of the screen, making Julia and Harry jump. "Dr. Daniel Lieberman from Harvard wrote an article on the benefits of barefoot running and minimalist shoes! You should look it up, boss, it was published in Nature!"

Miss Jackie poked her head outside the screens.

"They look like gorilla feet for the colour-blind, Robert!" she said tartly.

Miss Jackie poked her head back in and huffed when she saw Julia and Harry snickering. Her face turned fixed and stormy when Dr. Ju shouted Miss Jackie was so monochromatic it was planting grey shards into his heart. Miss Jackie poked her head out again and shouted that Dr. Ju's jacket looked like a pink suit had a baby with a tartan suit and there were no dominant genes. Furthermore, his tie looked like an Abstract Expressionist nightmare made of primal colours, at which point Julia and Harry lost it and fell on the floor laughing.

After their normally thirty minute music lessons, which ended fifteen minutes late because Julia and Harry simply couldn't stop laughing, the three of them left the screened area. Dr. Ju was still there in his hideous outfit. Hagrid was there too, which wasn't exactly out of the ordinary, except the gamekeeper was talking animatedly with Dr. Ju, and was carrying a bunch of wooden crates.

"Though' yeh two'd be back at yer common rooms by now," said Hagrid cheerfully. "I wonder yeh cou' help us prepare these crates…"

"What are they for?" asked Harry.

"Care packages fer Sirius Black," said Hagrid. "Professor Dumbledore reckons he's prob'ly out there in the forest… Jack an'

me been makin' 'em and puttin' them out there fer 'im."

Harry felt a nasty pang of guilt. He had completely forgotten about the fact Sirius Black was still out there, not knowing he was proven innocent in the eyes of public, and the official announcement of thereof was only a matter of time. He merely assumed he'd turn up eventually. It never occurred to him to think about finding him.

Dr. Ju walked over and looked into the crates.

"Blankets, food, and clothing: check," he muttered. "Water: check. First-aid kit?"

"We put in bandages, salves, and pepper-up," said Miss Jackie.

"Add a gangrene remedy," said Dr. Ju, "And a potion for frostbite. I doubt Sirius Black knows how to live rough in the winter time. Most don't unless a veteran homeless person gives them pointers, and they don't realize their flesh is dying because of the cold."

"Gangrene and frostbite, I haven't considered that," said Miss Jackie thoughtfully. "Have you done this before?"

"Well, *yeah*," said Dr. Ju, as though it were obvious. "I live in Baltimore when I'm not travelling. When winter rolls around, I soak gloves and socks in a remedy paste and hand them out."

"You do this *often* ."

"If I cure their gangrene, *everyone* would notice the magic; and an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure."

Miss Jackie smiled. "So for you, it's a matter of *when* not *if* ."

"What else could it be?" said Dr. Ju curiously.

Miss Jackie shrugged, still smiling faintly. "I don't think we have those potions in store. Can you make them, Robert?"

"Why not ask your potions master?"

"Why ask him when we have a healer right here?"

Dr. Ju blinked at Miss Jackie (who twinkled), Hagrid (who refused to meet his eye), Julia and Harry (who would agree to any limited/lack of exposure to Snape).

"It's one of *those* things, eh?" Dr. Ju said at length. "Fine. I'll make the potion."

He walked over to a corner, where a black wheeled Samsonite was standing. First, he pulled out a large wooden chest that had many small drawers from the Samsonite. Then, instead of a cauldron, he whipped out a flat pan with very short sides.

"I hate cauldrons," he said before anyone asked. "I made better potions using Woks and Dutch Ovens."

Dr. Ju put the pan to the side and conjured a large terracotta pot out of thin air-without a wand in sight. He blew on the pile of charcoal briquettes inside the terracotta pot and they suddenly ignited. Dr. Ju placed a grate in the terracotta pot and covered the pot with a vented lid. Then he started to rummage inside the wooden chest's drawers. Harry recognised most of the ingredients Dr. Ju was pulling out, many of which were too big to be kept inside the drawers unless the inner dimension of the drawers were extended by magic (which Harry reminded himself, they probably were). The dry ingredients were neatly placed in the centre of white square sheets of paper folded twice and the wet ingredients on small white ceramic dishes. Finally, once he had all his ingredients in place, Dr. Ju pulled out a glass teapot full of water and a stone vessel Harry usually associated with fancy Bibimbap from the bottom-most drawer, which was the largest. The teapot was placed on top of a ceramic stand that had a lit tea candle on the bottom, and the stone vessel and pan were placed on top of the grate placed inside the terracotta pot.

"Not that I know a thing about Potions, but this is an odd way of doing it," Miss Jackie said, staring at the terracotta pot that was burning like a jet-exhaust.

"Most magical fires aren't reliable," said Dr. Ju, who was grinding spices with a mortar and pestle.

"Aren't there special fire pits for this sort of thing?" asked Julia.

"Why shell out hundreds of galleons for a uni-tasking stove?" Dr. Ju retorted. "I can generate the thousand degrees Fahrenheit I need with a terracotta pot and charcoal, and it only costs me fifty bucks at the hardware store. Also," he clicked his tongue at the pestle. "I'd use an electric coffee grinder for this normally, but I didn't bring one."

Harry, Julia, Hagrid and Miss Jackie watched as Dr. Ju worked. The spices were placed on a cheese cloth, which was then tied into a ball and left to steep inside the teapot. The steeped amber liquid was eventually poured into the stone vessel that was heating up a thick white paste. Then came what comprised the majority of the potion making process: waiting.

While waiting on the potion, Dr. Ju honed his knife, which was made of carbon steel instead of silver.

"How come you don't use a silver blade?" asked Julia.

"Silver is traditional; it's pure and draws out impurities from the ingredients-supposedly. I don't buy it. Unless you have a Goblin-made silver knife, you just have a blade that has a soft edge and goes blunt too easily. As for impurities, as long as you keep your ingredients separately in proper containers, you don't have to worry about it."

Dr. Ju started chopping and dicing the ingredients. In the fraction of the time it took Harry on a good day, he julienned his gurdle roots, grated his sophouric rhizomes and diced the leeches into perfect cubes, losing very little liquid or fine fibres in the process. He didn't just add the ingredients to the potion either; some he toasted (to draw out the oils), others he *baked* over the coals (to remove moisture) and he actually massaged a slimy octopus for over ten minutes before he carefully tipped it into the blazing-hot pan.

"Do healers do more spell-based healing or potion-based healing?" asked Harry.

"Potions, hands down," Dr. Ju answered. "Potions work *with* the body-it draws out what the bodies naturally does, and lets it heal on its own terms. Spells overrules the body-hence you see a lot of scar

tissue resulting even with the best charmers. The difference is as stark as major open-heart surgery and a vaccine shot. Mind you, spell work has it place just as much as accident and emergency medicine."

"So, if I wanted to, say, create a treatment for the werewolf curse…"

"… You should think potions," said Dr. Ju. Then he looked at Harry and Julia keenly. "You mentioned the werewolf curse *particularly* . Why?"

Harry looked at Julia, but she just shook her head. So Harry spoke instead; as weird as Dr. Ju was, he wasn't nasty like Snape.

"Julia had this idea maybe if you can make the curse forget the full moon exists, the curse won't trigger at all."

"Ah, yes, the trigger removal," said Dr. Ju, nodding. "A lot of healers love that idea for werewolf treatment, seeing as curse removal would require *magic* removal, and most people don't want that."

"Most wou' rather die than live witho' magic, yeah," said Hagrid sagely. "Quite a' few of 'em did, I heard, chosin' ter die than live a Squib afta' 1962 happ'n'd."

"What happened in…?" Harry began to ask, but Miss Jackie looked so sad he shut his mouth. "Err, so why didn't anyone discover a way yet?"

"Well, the *idea* is straightforward," said Dr. Ju as he stirred the potion counterclockwise. "Rather than tackling the *curse*, which can't be altered or lifted because it embeds itself into a person's magic, why not make a victim's magic forget that the full moon exists?"

" *Oh*, of course! You should target a person's magic, since it's magic that has sentience, not spells!" said Julia.

"But therein lies the problem," said Dr. Ju. " *Where* is this magic? How do you locate a person's magic? Does it even make sense to say that magic is located somewhere specific? Mind, the magical core hypothesis is very attractive. Dead spirits can't do magic. Magical creatures always have a body, and their active magic

vanishes the moment they die. So there is a relationship between having a living body and having active magic. But how can you locate it? Unless you know how to locate magic, you can't create a potion that targets active magic. You can't aim at something you can't see."

"Is it really necessary to know where it is?" asked Harry.

"Oh yes," said Dr. Ju. "You see, there is physicality to magic. Not a lot of people appreciate this fine point. Magic can touch abstract, intangible things such as Time, Secrets and Memory, but only if there is an underlying physical reality it can be tied down to . You can hide information, but only if you have a living person to seal it inside to. You can erase memory, but only if there is a brain that stores it. Did you know you can't make a ghost forget things because they have no corporeal body?"

Harry didn't know that. "Really?"

"Yes, really," said Dr. Ju. "I tried it."

Harry gaped at him for a moment.

"The problem is twofold, then," said Miss Jackie pensively. "In order for this kind of treatment to work, magic must be tied to a body in such a way there is a physical memory storage one can access. The first question to ask is: *Is* magic tied to the body? The fact that dead bodies do not have active usable magic seems to suggest this is the case. If so, where could it be?"

"The heart?" Harry guessed.

"Popular candidate, showed a lot of promise, but no, it didn't quite work out," said Dr. Ju.

"The brain?" said Julia.

"Same as the heart."

"Skin or bones?" said Hagrid.

"Same story."

Miss Jackie closed her eyes with her hands clasped and both of her thumbs pressing the bridge of her nose in a pose of deep thought, while Dr. Ju poured the glutinous and golden paste from the stone vessel into vials, using a funnel.

"The tie between magic and the body seems to be *life*," she said slowly. "So where life is, magic must be there also. Life is in the blood. Therefore, magic is in the blood."

Dr. Ju stared at her, lips parting. He seemed to have forgotten the vial he was holding. Oblivious to his staring, Miss Jackie continued to think aloud:

"Blood has information storage in the form of DNA, protein, and enzymes. Whether the existence of information and information storage in the blood is enough for memory charms to work, I don't know, but it does pass the 'mind' and 'brain' test. Robert, do you think-"

Only then did Miss Jackie open her eyes to see Dr. Ju was staring at her with dilated pupils.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked, frowning.

Dr. Ju blinked and snapped his mouth shut. It took several more blinks for him to be able to say anything.

"… Care packages?" he said, raising the vial.

"Oh! I'm sorry, yes, we shouldn't forget him," said Miss Jackie, blinking at the crates and turning pink.

They filled them up. Miss Jackie created copies of all the *Daily Prophet* articles that wrote about the reinvestigation into Sirius Black's case, stapling them together in chronological order. Harry put an unbreakable charm on the glass vials per Dr. Ju's request. Dr. Ju carefully labelled each one, and attached instructions on how to use them. On top of the non-perishable foods, Hagrid included a bundle of Bath Buns into the food packages, which Harry discreetly discarded (Harry had too much experience with Hagrid's cooking).

Hagrid and Dr. Ju were getting ready to take the crates to the

Forbidden Forest, when Miss Jackie lifted the lid of the pan, which was cooking a very fragrant and colourful rice dish.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Oh, that's for you," said Dr. Ju, grinning cheekily. "Paella. It's my own recipe."

Miss Jackie looked up to stare, but Dr. Ju was exiting the music chamber through a hole very much like the one Harry had seen Mr. Shin make in Hermione's house. He could see dark, thick trees from the other side of the hole, and Dr. Ju walked right through it fearlessly whilst carrying four wooden crates like they weighed nothing.

Miss Jackie sighed when the hole sealed itself. "I wish he was easier to hate," she complained.

Harry returned to the Gryffindor common room shortly after Hagrid left for the Forbidden Forest-which he did after he supped on the delicious Paella with Harry, Julia and Miss Jackie.

He spotted Ron and Hermione at a table, with Crookshanks stretched across Hermione's lap and Ron absently scratching his chin. Ever since he discovered Crookshanks had been attacking *Pettigrew* because he sensed the Rat animagus was suspicious, Ron had warmed up to the cat considerably.

"You're late today," said Ron as Harry sat down.

"A lot of stuff happened," said Harry.

He then told them about the care packages Miss Jackie and Hagrid were making for Sirius Black.

"I saw Miss Jackie's new employee too," said Harry. "He's *seriously* weird."

"Weird how?"

"He wears shoes that look like gorilla feet for their health benefits."

Ron and Hermione stared.

"… Are you sure he's *safe* ?" asked Ron.

"Miss Jackie thinks so," said Harry. "Hagrid doesn't seem to mind him either."

"Professor Dumbledore wouldn't let him in if he wasn't safe," said Hermione sensibly. "And can you imagine what Grandmaster Shin would do if he wasn't?"

The three of them looked at each other and shuddered.

Crookshanks, who had been staring at Harry keenly throughout his talk, suddenly leaped off of Hermione's lap and stood on top the table, right in front of Harry.

"What?" he asked the cat, who was staring at him pointedly.

Crookshanks swooped down and caught a mouthful of Harry's robe sleeve. He then jumped off the table and started moving towards the portrait hole, dragging Harry with him, his bottlebrush tail high in the air.

"You want me to follow you? Now?" said Harry incredulously, stumbling because he had to bend low.

"But he can't, Crookshanks!" Hermione cried. "We're not supposed to leave the castle after sundown!"

"Is this important?" asked Ron. "Can't this wait until tomorrow?"

Crookshanks swished his tail in a way one would say no.

"… Fine," said Harry. "But we're taking my old dad's cloak."

Lestrade didn't think his windfall would change things; the magic business, yes, but not the windfall.

He was surprised, therefore, when he didn't feel any defensive

comebacks rising to his throat when the Super hounded him over the Embalmer case. Being debt free and financially independent really did change a man, Lestrade thought almost philosophically, as he calmly watched the Super's red face.

"Are you listening to me?" Superintendent Chambers demanded.

"Yes, sir," Lestrade replied.

"So what have you got?"

"I think the embalmer *isn't* a serial killer," Lestrade started.

After working on magical hate crimes for over five months, Lestrade started to see a pattern. The really wizard ones were hard to find and figure out *because* they were so blatantly magical the victims immediately went into denial. But the ones committed by wizards who had a glancing idea of Muggles were often easier to catch because their effort to pass off as Muggle only made the magical tinkering more obvious.

The Embalmer case fell into the latter category. The perps knew enough about Muggle hospitals to pass as a worker, but didn't know the computer system would leave a data trail. The perps had a general idea what *serial killers* were, but had little notion on how they actually operated.

"The whole crime is made to look like the work of a serial killer almost to an exaggerated degree," Sherlock had said. "If the perpetrators *want* you to think the crime is the work of a serial killer, there are only two options: you are either dealing with a megalomaniac hedonist or a mundane murderer who is pretending to be one."

Lestrade guessed it was the latter, mostly because of how clever the perps were trying to be. They acted exactly like those idiots who took pains to keep their crimes DNA-free, but then slipped up and showed themselves on CCTV; those who tried to kill their victims without leaving traces, but the very method that left so few traces made them culpable of the crime. The Embalmer was just like that. They took the pains to create an untraceable potion, but the potion's

very volatility betrayed the fact the crimes were a team effort and required special ingredients. They took pains to select victims that were similar to each other, but didn't bother to keep a consistent MO.

That was how Lestrade, after a lot of regular legwork, was able to find out the last Muggle victim, Victoria Savage, was heiress to a large fortune, which was now to go to a cousin of hers; a cousin, who at age eleven, was selected to go to *a special boarding school up in Scotland* .

"One the vic's cousin's name kept showing up on the potion ingredient buyer list," said Lestrade calmly. "The vic was to going inherit a half a million pounds from her grandmother. Now that she's dead, the money goes to her closest relative, which is the cousin."

Chambers sat back as the effed-upness of the situation hit him square on the face.

"The evidence isn't complete, yet," Lestrade warned. "We can't link the murders to him directly; he wasn't the only person who bought the stuff we found inside the victims. They are common 'skin potion' ingredients. You can imagine how many 'witches' buy them."

"But you are certain this isn't the work of a serial killer."

"Pretty damn certain. Right now we're looking for the cousin. I have a couple of people who might know him."

"Good. Keep on at it. I'm expecting results from you soon, Lestrade. Don't mess up."

Lestrade returned to his office feeling rather at peace with the world.

Which was probably why the world decided to declare another war against him: his mobile lit up and the words *Baker Street Bastard's Brother* flashed across the screen.

"What now?" Lestrade grumbled.

"Good evening, Inspector," said Mycroft Holmes in his cloying tone. "I took the liberty of glancing at the high-profile case you are working

on. You must've realised it is not the work of a serial killer, surely."

"Yes, it was *obvious* ."

"Excellent. You're handling the case with less than your usual- that's to say, you're handling it fairly well."

"Gee, thanks," said Lestrade sarcastically. "So why are you calling me? You know your brother hates you interloping."

"I am very much aware, Inspector, but my brother is-how should I put this- *indisposed* at the moment. So I am informing you what he has meant to tell you earlier: look closely at Culverton and Smith."

Lestrade frowned. "Why is he indisposed?"

"Look up and you will see."

Lestrade looked up and saw John heading towards his office. John stopped right outside the glass door and turned up both palms in an inquiring manner. Lestrade shook his head in the negative, though he didn't know what the question was if he were honest. In the middle of this interlude, Mycroft disconnected the call.

John entered his office while Lestrade muttered a bane on the Holmes brothers.

"So Sherlock isn't here?" asked John, sitting down.

"Haven't seen him today," said Lestrade.

John scratched a temple, "Thought he'd be here since he figured out who the Embalmer is."

"The cousin?"

"Yes, you already knew?"

"Finding out it was the cousin isn't the hard part; *proving* that it's him is," said Lestrade. Then he looked at John's wane face with concern; John hadn't looked this bad since the early days of A Study In Pink. "You okay?"

"I…" John blinked against the florescent lights in the station while absently scratching her stomach. "I'm okay. I just… excuse me, but did you eat Korma today? I can smell your breath from all the way here. It's making me nauseous."

Lestrade thought this behaviour was very familiar: light sensitivity, bad reaction to certain smells, nausea…

… *F-* . No wonder Sherlock was indisposed.

"Why the feck are you here and not him when you're… !" Lestrade gestured at his own belly wildly.

"Don't blame him, I'm as much in shock as he is," John blanched. "I need to use the toilet."

John dashed out, Lestrade's insistence that she use his wastepaper bin notwithstanding. Swearing loudly, Lestrade picked up his mobile and texted:

Where the f- are you, your very pregnant wife is in the station and Culverton & Smith are due here in five minutes!

Final Notes : The conversations between the kids are based on actual conversations of young teenagers I've heard. The method to get over crushes mentioned above is one my own mother gave me. The effectiveness varies and side-effects include random inappropriate sniggering.

miguel. cura suggested Vibrams for Robert's next footwear. They were too hideous to not show up. :D

Wrapping up POA in the next chapter… I hope.

About Human Nature

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Two: About Human Nature

Lestrade called Donovan on his way to the ladies, and she hovered next to John with a water bottle ready while the latter puked into a sink. From the muffled words and beeping noise that filtered through the door, Lestrade knew Donovan was texting everyone and soon the entire station would know Sherlock Holmes was about to have a baby.

Sure enough, a sizeable crowd started loitering in front of the toilets where Lestrade was standing guard, talking about the News amongst themselves and asking/demanding Lestrade that he confirm the News.

"Don't you guys have work to do?" he shouted at the milling crowd.

"And miss congratulating Dr. Watson in person? Hell, no!" shouted Gregson from somewhere.

The crowd murmured in agreement. Then they continued to talk about the horrible things they were going to do to Sherlock when he deigned to show up next time. To prevent the women officers from entering the toilet, Lestrade took out his baton and waved it at the group, telling them he was an equal-opportunity fighter and not

afraid to prove it.

The lady officers were entirely unimpressed at Lestrade's stand. To show it, they sicced the (terrifying) ladies from Admin at Lestrade to deal with him.

Lestrade was two seconds away from being flung to the side and trampled underfoot by the ladies from Admin, when a popping noise far too similar to gunfire came from inside the lady's toilets. The special firearms officers barged to the front at the sound, and everyone else moved out of the way in a coordinated fashion to let them through.

Then the door swung open, and Culverton ran out of the lady's toilet. He rammed right into Firearms and Admin and staggered back several steps.

" *GET HIM!* " Donovan screamed, brandishing a Taser, while Smith lay twitching on the tiled floor beneath her feet.

A bit apart from Smith was John, who was slumped on the floor beneath the sinks. She wasn't moving.

Firearms and Admin took one look at John and descended upon Culverton. All cautionary thoughts of police brutality scandals were clearly driven out their minds because batons and fists were flying indiscriminately. To make sure neither wizard carried out any bright ideas, Lestrade joined the fray and tased both Culverton and Smith with the modified Taser his father-in-law gave him for 'emergencies'.

When Firearms and Admin were finished, Culverton looked like a gigantic bruise.

"You're arrested… for illegal… *everything!* " shouted Stella Hopkins from Special Ops.

" *Creeper* !" screamed Edith from Admin.

The other women cried similar abuse. Donovan alone joined Lestrade at the floor next to John. John looked unharmed, but she wasn't getting up either.

"Donovan, get the EMT, call them *now* !" Lestrade shouted.

Donovan nodded and then dashed off, shouting orders over the noisy scuffle that was commencing around Smith. Several Uniforms were wrestling Smith to the ground as he screamed hysterically it was *gone*, his magic was *gone*, his wand wasn't working. He kept screaming and fighting the Uniforms until Anderson stabbed the back of his neck with something. Then he went limp and quiet.

"Psychotic break?" said Anderson shakily.

"Looks like it," said Lestrade, feeling just as shaken if not for the same reasons as Anderson. "Put him through a tox screen. I want him on around-the-clock guard until we can lock him up properly."

The Uniforms roughly carried the limp Smith away. The EMT came around after they left. Anderson told them what they needed to know: ex-service person; likely has metal shrapnel inside body; at least 6 weeks pregnant.

Lestrade texted Sherlock in the meantime:

Get your arse over to St. Thomas's. John unconscious & not getting up.

Lestrade rode the ambulance that drove John over to the A&E. Half of the jumbled thoughts that rampaged inside his brain were murderous and featured Sherlock as the victim. The other half desperately pleaded for John and baby to be safe.

When Sherlock finally did show up, John was blinking awake and Lestrade was shocked out of his bloodthirsty mood when he saw Mycroft Holmes tailing after his brother.

Sherlock hovered just outside the screens for a long time. He looked both younger and older with his face bleached out of colour in stark contrast to his ridiculous signature coat that had its collar propped up.

"… John," he eventually asked in a low voice. "Are we good?"

John let out a shuddering sigh. " *Yes* . Now get over here."

Only then did Sherlock walk over to John. Lestrade soon found himself unceremoniously tossed outside the A&E. He was grateful for it. Sherlock appeared to be moved to the point of tears and John was tremblingly reaching out to him, whispering: " *I was so scared…* " One didn't stay present in such private moments, especially for those two.

Lestrade waited with Mycroft in the waiting lounge. Lestrade felt especially awkward standing next to Mycroft Holmes, who looked calm and immaculate with all his hair in place, and wearing a tailored pinstripe suit, Italian leather shoes and carrying a handcrafted umbrella. Lestrade, out of nerves, kept running a hand through his hair, making it stand further on end, and fretted inside his rumbled clothes that bore all the stains of daily police wear.

"Congratulations, Inspector," said Mycroft out of the blue.

"For what?" Lestrade asked.

"Well, you don't want me to go over all the reasons, now, do you?" said Mycroft phlegmatically. "And thank you."

Lestrade stared as Mycroft strode back inside the A&E without a backwards glance.

"So how did you know it was Culverton *and* Smith?"

That was the first question John asked after both she and Sherlock composed themselves enough to stop crying and Sherlock stopped pawing at John to assure himself that John-and Benedict/Beatrix-was alright.

"Lestrade frequently complained about Smith's egregious wizardness and his utter lack of effort to stifle it," said Sherlock. "Even reporting him to his superiors and providing a uniform for him to wear didn't stop him. Why such a stubborn refusal to change? There were three possible explanations: Smith is unprofessional, prejudiced, or he had a more sinister reason to keep up his fashion faux pas. I might have considered the first two options had it not

been for the fact his partner Culverton had no such troubles. Culverton should've at least voiced token protest if only to make his own self look good. But he didn't. If anything, he aid and abetted Smith by failing to report his behaviour to the Magical Law Enforcement. The two were in it together, then. I realised the scheme the moment Lestrade told me Smith had been erasing DI Morton's memory on a daily basis: Smith kept his seeming lack of expertise in Muggle dress to give himself an excuse to Obliviate the Muggle lead investigator and stall his progress."

"And it would've worked if it weren't for Lestrade," said John. "Most Wizards assume Muggles simply don't see anything worthwhile. They wouldn't have even blinked if Morton's investigation came to nothing."

Sherlock nodded. "And the truth was only kept hidden for so long because the investigators of the Magic and non-Magic worlds weren't aware of each other. When someone who had access to both worlds-Lestrade- took charge of the case, solving it became a matter of tedious legwork: he eventually discovered one of the victims had a wizard cousin, who will receive half a million pounds thanks to her death. That cousin, incidentally, is *Smith* ."

There was a moment's silence.

"All those deaths just for half a million pounds," said John, shaking her head. "I'll never get it."

"People have done and will continue to do heinous acts for things that can't love them back. You know that, John."

"I do. Makes you wonder why more people don't believe in the innate sinfulness of man."

"Most would rather delude themselves into believing they possess innate goodness because they are not as evil as they can get," Sherlock sniffed. "The Embalmer case was one such travesty. Neither Smith nor Culverton could bring themselves to murder their victims in person, but had no problems killing them indirectly via poison. Perhaps they assuaged their consciences with the idea they were at least making the already dying victims' last moments

painless and beautiful, unlike a proper serial killer."

"That might be true for Smith, but not Culverton," said John. "I think he was well on his way to becoming a *real* serial killer. The way he was eyed *anyone* who fit his cultivated MO… he wasn't exactly hiding it. Thank God he was too stupid to keep at it for long."

Sherlock clutched John more tightly.

"I refuse to be thankful for someone else's stupidity," he snarled. "I'll rather thank *Anderson* ."

"Really?" said John sceptically.

In response, Sherlock promptly made a call on speaker phone. The silence that prevailed over the line and the room after he finished talking was very telling.

Then there was a sound-the sound of exchanging hands.

"Freak," said Donovan's voice. "I've seen you work for the last four years, and… you're not. A freak anymore, I mean. You're still weird as *hell*, but a psychopath can't raise happy, healthy kids. Harry, case in point. So, um, good job. We're really proud of you. And congrats."

The only time Sherlock was surprised and moved by the softer human emotions than that moment was the time he decided to propose to John, minutes before he went to confront Moriarty.

"… Thank you," said Sherlock. Then he looked away, blinking. " *Thank you.* "

He hung up abruptly. A few moments later he was the cold and practical thinker once more.

"Now only the Sirius Black mystery remains. We just have to figure out a way to contact him."

Harry couldn't say why he thought it was a good idea to follow

Crookshanks after curfew. From the anxious and disapproving looks Hermione was throwing at him, Harry could tell she was harbouring grave doubts over the idea. Nevertheless, she joined Harry and Ron's discussion on how to go about it.

They went to bed at the usual time, and waited until Dean and Seamus finally went to sleep. Then Ron, Harry and Neville got up, got dressed again, Ron and Harry threw the cloak over themselves, and Neville pretended to go to the toilet as they slipped outside the dormitory. Hermione was waiting for them with Crookshanks in the empty common room. She quietly joined Ron and Harry under the cloak and together they slipped outside.

Walking very close together so that nobody would see them, they crossed the hallways on tiptoe beneath the cloak, and then walked down the stone front steps into the grounds. The sun had set hours ago and the castle lent very little light. Once they passed the sloping lawn, they could barely see a foot ahead of them.

" *Lumos* !" Harry whispered, pointing his wand forward.

The wandlight showed him the ghostly sight of a solitary willow tree: the Whomping Willow. Crookshanks ran right towards it. They chased after him. As they got closer, the Whomping Willow started to stir; its branches creaked as though in a high wind, whipping backward and forward to stop anyone from going nearer.

" *No* !" Hermione whispered frantically, dancing uncertainly on her spot. "Crookshanks, please, it's too dangerous!"

But Crookshanks darted forward. He slithered between the battering branches like a snake and placed his front paws upon a knot on the trunk.

Abruptly, as though the tree had been turned to marble, it stopped moving. Not a leaf twitched or shook.

"How…?" Hermione whispered uncertainly, grasping Ron's arm. "How did he know-?"

"Never mind that, you reckon he wants us to go in?" said Ron,

pointing at Crookshanks, who was now standing on top a large gap between the roots.

"I think so," said Harry grimly.

They covered the distance to the trunk within seconds, but before they had reached the gap in the roots, Crookshanks had slid into it with a flick of his bottlebrush tail. Harry went next; he crawled forward, headfirst, and slid down an earthy slope to the bottom of a very low tunnel. Crookshanks was a little way along, his eyes flashing in the light from Harry's wand. Seconds later, Ron and Hermione slithered down beside him.

"Where does this tunnel come out?" Hermione asked breathlessly. "It was marked on the Marauder's Map, but it goes off the edge…"

"Maybe Hogsmeade?" whispered Ron.

"It ends at the Shrieking Shack," said Harry, setting off, bent-backed, after Crookshanks. "And don't worry, it's not actually haunted," he added when he heard Hermione's frightened squeak. "People only *thought* it was when Lupin started using it for his werewolf transformations as a student…"

They moved as fast as they could, bent almost double; ahead of them, Crookshanks' tail bobbed in and out of view. On and on went the passage, and before long the three of them were drawing breaths in sharp, painful gasps, running at a crouch…

And then the tunnel began to rise; moments later it twisted, and Crookshanks was gone. Ahead Harry could see a patch of dim light through a small opening.

He, Ron and Hermione paused, gasping for breath, edging forward. They raised their wands to see what lay beyond.

It was a room, a very disordered, dusty room. Paper was peeling from the walls; there were stains all over the floor; every piece of furniture was broken as though somebody had smashed it. The windows were all boarded up. Harry glanced at Ron and Hermione, both who looked very frightened but nodded.

Harry pulled himself out of the hole, staring around. The room was deserted, but a door to their right stood open, leading to a shadowy hallway. His eyes fell on a wooden chair near them. Large chunks had been torn out of it; one of the legs had been ripped off entirely. The rest of the furniture inside the room had a similar look about them- torn and shredded as though a beast ripped them apart with its teeth.

Harry briefly imagined a young Lupin locked up here during the full moon, tearing at the furniture and his own body because he was separated from humans he could bite; then surveying the carnage he created after the full moon, alone until someone could escort him back to Hogwarts (Madam Pomfrey, perhaps?). What kind of thoughts went through his mind? Did he, like the anonymous author of *Hairy Snout, Human Heart*, loathed that new side of him that was destructive and mad? Did he feel a sense of abandonment and alienation that he couldn't describe in words?

I felt so alone, every time the full moon waxed and waned…

At that moment, there was a creak overhead.

Something had moved upstairs. The three of them looked up at the ceiling. Hermione suddenly grabbed Ron's arm again, very tightly. Ron raised his eyebrows at her, and she nodded again, letting go.

Quietly as they could, they crept out into the hall and up the crumbling staircase. Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust except the floor, where there were two sets of paw marks. One belonged to Crookshanks, surely. But other set belonged to something much larger than the cat.

They reached the dark landing. Only one door was open. As they crept toward it, they heard movement from behind it; a low moan, and then a deep, loud purring. They exchanged a last look, a last nod.

Wand held tightly before him, Harry slowly opened the door.

On a magnificent four-poster bed with dusty hangings laid Crookshanks, purring loudly at the sight of them. Next to

Crookshanks sat a strange man.

A mass of filthy, matted hair hung to his elbows. If eyes hadn't been shining out of the deep, dark sockets, he might have been a corpse. The waxy skin was stretched so tightly over the bones of his face, it looked like a skull. It was Sirius Black.

For a while it felt as though time had stopped. Harry just stood there, frozen, with his wand outstretched, as the final, missing pieces of the puzzle slotted themselves into their spots. All those attacks Crookshanks lay upon Scabbers… how Sirius Black managed to get into Hogwarts undetected… why Crookshanks knew Black was here on this particular night… why Peter Pettigrew, a friend of his birth father, was an Animagus…

Sirius Black stared up at him out of those sunken eyes.

"Going to kill me, Harry?" he whispered.

Harry belatedly realised he was pointing his wand at Sirius's chest. He quickly whispered, " *Nox* " and put his wand away.

Then Harry drew in a deep breath.

"I know the whole story," he started. "My old dad - James Potter - switched Secret Keepers the last minute; it was Pettigrew instead of you. Pettigrew sold my parents to Voldemort, but it backfired on him. Pettigrew framed you and pretended to be a rat all these years. Fudge gave you a copy of the *Daily Prophet* last summer that showed a picture of Ron and his pet rat. You recognised the rat in the photo was Pettigrew. You… got *angry* ."

Sirius gaped at Harry. He looked like he was driven speechless.

"' *Bitterness is a paralytic. Love is much more vicious motivator* '," said Harry, remembering Sherlock's words. "You hated Pettigrew for making you lose everyone you loved. This wasn't something positive, so the Dementors couldn't take it away from you. The moment you knew where to look, you were able to take actions. I suppose you're an Animagus like Pettigrew… you transformed and escaped as an animal. Dementors can't see, so they wouldn't have

been able to tell. What is your form?"

"… A dog," said Sirius slowly. "I can transform into a dog. But how…?"

"I've been reading about werewolves," said Harry. "They're only dangerous to *humans* . Animals are okay. If you knew Lupin's secret and you cared about him, then you would've tried to make him feel better about the werewolf thing - make him feel less lonely. That's why you, my old dad and Pettigrew decided to become Animagi, right?"

Sirius nodded.

"Your Animagus ability came in very handy after you broke out of Azkaban," Harry continued. "You kept yourself hidden by staying in your dog form. You tried to catch Pettigrew, and somehow got Crookshanks to help. You've been in communication with him all this time. When the Dementors started to look for you in Hogsmeade, you holed up here in the Shrieking Shack, waiting for the right time to enter Hogwarts again…"

There was a long pause. Sirius was slumped forward, staring at his feet, like he couldn't bring himself to believe what he just heard.

"You-don't have to hide anymore," said Harry. "Pettigrew is gone, but everyone knows about him now."

"Yeah, and the Ministry is reinvestigating your case," said Ron. "It's been all over the *Prophet* . Someone found video footage of Pettigrew killing all those Muggles with a Blasting curse… our kind is screaming for your freedom, you know. They're angry that you didn't even get a proper trial."

"If you can't believe us, go look around for wooden crates in the Forbidden Forest," said Hermione. "Hagrid and our music teacher, they've been leaving them out for you. There's food and blankets and copies of the *Daily Prophet* in them. You can read it yourself."

Sirius continued to stare at his feet. Harry raked his brains for something else to say-something that would move this man to

believe him.

"Baker Street," said Harry abruptly. "I live in 221B Baker Street. London. When… this is all over, when you have time, come visit me."

Sirius looked up.

"I'll wait," Harry promised.

John was resting on the couch a few days after the overnight stay at the A&E. As John listened to Sherlock putter around the kitchen, a rip appeared right in the centre of 221B's sitting room. This kind of seemingly impossible things happened all the time, so John didn't even blink when the rip opened and a man dressed in an off-white suit jacket, white unbuttoned sleeved shirt, and a black T-shirt that had ornate flower patterns drawn with fluorescent gradient lines peered half-way out of the elliptical hole.

"Hi, Robert," said John, side-eyeing the eye-burning T-shirt.

"Hiiii," said Robert, waving and grinning goofily. "So how is the bun in the oven?"

"How does everyone know?" John grumbled. "Well, I think conception happened around Christmas or the first week of January, so…"

"… You're about 10 weeks pregnant," said Robert, darting his eyes around the flat as he did the calculations. "That means you're due late August or early September."

"Yeah, that sounds about right."

Robert nodded as he slipped out of the hole. He was wearing grey trousers that looked like bellbottoms, and John was pretty sure the beltline reached his navel. The Sperry's on his feet were lime green and pink tartan.

"That is the most *tragic* outfit I've ever seen," John declared.

"Is it?" asked Robert as he put down his portable wooden chest of drawers. "Jacqueline said the same thing."

"Oh, yeah, you work for her, don't you?" said John, grinning. "Isn't she cute when she's upset?"

"Like a tiny irate kitten," said Robert, nodding. "And I don't work for her anymore; I got fired last night."

"Sacked, you mean. So what did you do? Wore your shinny mirror suit to work?"

"No, I…" Robert blushed a bit. "I asked her to marry me."

There was silence for a span of a minute.

"… Okay, back up," said John, making backward flapping gestures, while Sherlock came to her side with a look a deep intrigue on his face. "How did this happen?"

"When you got shipped over to the A&E, Jack dragged me over there to visit. We met a friend of Sherlock's there."

"You mean enemy?"

" *Archenemy* ."

"Yep, I know exactly who you're talking about. Let me guess: he offered her money to do some research for him."

"No resources spared, and whatever price she asks," Robert confirmed. "Apparently Jacqueline's been scrubbing the Internets and removing compromising digital data since 2008; how Mr. Archenemy knew this, I have no idea. But he said she must've developed it when a teacher friend of hers told her a bunch of kids took humiliating photos a poor kid they'd singled out for bullying and worried they might post them on Facebook. Well, next thing we know, all the data is gone. Like, vanished. Without a trace."

"Yep, sounds like something she'd do, sneakily without telling anyone," said John sagely. "I suppose Mr. Archenemy wanted whatever it is she made so he can maintain the Muggle-Magic status

quo and do some clandestine cyber warfare on the side. What did she say?"

" ' *Your money is very impressive; your job, not so much.* ' "

John almost fell off the couch laughing, and Sherlock rumbled with gleeful chuckles.

"Oh, *Jack*," said John, wiping her eyes. "She's growing quite a spine. Use to be such a pushover."

"I don't think she was ever a pushover, to be quite honest," said Robert wistfully. "But can you blame me for thinking there can be no other woman for me?"

"No," said John. "So you did what you usually do when you're not in doctor-mode: just blurted everything out. Is that how you got sacked?"

"She thought I was joking at first. But when I insisted that I'm always completely serious…"

"… *Chop*," John finished. "You poor, socially-stunted bastard."

"I didn't know what else to do," said Robert, scratching the back of his head awkwardly. "I've never pursued someone before. How did you do it?"

The last question was tossed at Sherlock. Sherlock, true to form, simply ignored it. So John answered instead:

"Made me worry about him constantly by catching the eye of a criminal mastermind, dragging me to a bunch of crime scenes and offending everyone there, and almost getting killed and publicly disgraced by aforementioned criminal mastermind. Then whilst staying underground to ride out the media shat storm that followed his fake suicide, he took me a series of dates without actually telling me that they were dates. They were so awkward and stupid I knew he was actually serious about the marriage proposal, which he used to shock me to sleep so he could confront criminal mastermind alone."

Robert stared at John for a long time.

"… You're not lying," he declared. "How is that even possible?"

"Welcome to my life," said John dryly.

"You're not here just to learn about our marriage story, surely?" Sherlock groused.

"Of course not," Robert huffed. "First off, a bit of news: Sirius Black turned himself in and his trial is scheduled to happen as soon as the reinvestigation to his case is over. He's under house-arrest at the moment. He might come over to visit if/when the Wizengamot declares him innocent of all charges. As for me, I'm here to follow up on the potions Severus Snape gave you. He's a very good potioneer, but he's not actually a healer."

Sherlock turned inscrutable after the last statement. Robert donned latex gloves and pulled out sterilized acupuncture needles from one of the wooden drawers. He also pulled out several bottles and vials from two different drawers.

"Is magical acupuncture different from the non-magic ones?" asked John, looking fascinated.

"Well, the basic idea is the same," said Robert. "Use needles to stimulate the body and trigger healing."

" *But*," Sherlock said.

"There's magic involved," said Robert. "And we don't actually insert the needles."

Sherlock and John stared as the needles floated over to John's abdomen and arranged themselves in a row about an inch away from the skin. Then what looked like currents of electricity started to thread between the needles. Once all the needles were connected, the tips glowed and emitted beams of light.

"The minor part that got lost in translation," said Sherlock, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "How does it feel, John?"

"Tingly and warm."

"How very descriptive."

"Shut up, it's hard to explain."

Robert worked silently while Sherlock loudly demanded more details. He blew gently over the needles a few times and every time he did so the heat that pulsated inside John intensified for a moment. Then he dipped his nose almost directly on top of John's stomach-but never touching-and inhaled deeply. Something like silver vapour poured out of the needles and flowed into his eyes and ears.

"You're okay," Robert concluded, cutting off the magic current and putting the needles back into his wooden chest with a casual flick of a hand. "Looks like he bombarded you with the most potent restorative potions he could brew up for the last three years. Rough, but it did the job. Your kidney was a bit misshapen and your digestive tract got a bit pushed to the side, so I corrected that. Call me if your morning sickness doesn't go away."

"Great. Thanks."

"Take a mouthful of this twice a day," said Robert handing over a vial full of golden liquid, "And this once every other day," he handed over a small bottle of transparent potion, "and make sure you take your prenatal vitamins."

"What are the rest?" asked Sherlock, while John checked the labels.

"Cleaning solutions," said Robert seriously. "Your apartment is a *dust heap* ; bad for baby."

He then rolled up sleeves and marched into the kitchen, carrying the bottles with him.

"Helpful," said Sherlock, nodding, while Robert sprayed a potion on their countertops. "I see why you found him endearing."

"I suppose you like him now that he took over your cleaning duties," John mocked.

Sherlock glared briefly. They both turned to stare at the kitchen when a contained explosion suddenly lit it up like a furnace. They stared some more when white steam started billowing out through the slide doors.

Once the steam cleared, Robert left the kitchen holding up a huge greyish-green brick.

"This is all the dust that's been sitting around in your kitchen," he said indignantly. "Clean more often."

John promptly threw up.

Robert cleaned up the sitting room after banishing the bile and resulting dust bricks (even bigger than the one he made from the kitchen dust). After throwing on the walls something that looked like coarse sea salt except the grains dissolved immediately upon contact, he hung up a bundle of red chili peppers tied together with rope on the kitchen doorpost.

"What is that for?"

"Oh, this is just tradition," said Robert. "From my neck of the woods, we hang up red chili peppers when the mother is having a boy."

John blinked at him.

"We're having a boy?"

"Mmn," said Robert, nodding jerkily.

John mouthed ' *boy* ' as she texted Harry the news. Sherlock stared at John's tummy as she did so. Then he squinted at the bundle of chili peppers.

"… I'll never be able to look at chili peppers the same way ever again," he complained.

Severus was having an exceptionally bad first week of March. Sirius Black had turned himself in by knocking on the door to Hagrid's hut

the one Saturday morning he'd decided to sleep in. Dumbledore escorted Black to the Ministry of Magic immediately, and kept the news to himself all day until the *Evening Prophet* proclaimed it. The students would talk about nothing except Black from thereon out.

On top of that, Potter suddenly exhibited the same level of incompetence as Longbottom.

" *Orange*, Potter," barked Severus, ladling some up and allowing to splash back into the cauldron, " *Orange* . Didn't you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one rat spleen was needed? Didn't I state plainly that a dash of slug juice would suffice? Where have you placed your feeble little mind?"

Potter blinked at him with mooncalf like simplicity. It was as though he hadn't understood a single word he just said.

Severus had just bent down to say something vicious directly in Potter's face when the boy muttered in voice so low only he could hear:

" *I'm going to have a baby brother* ."

It took a while for the sentence to properly percolate through Severus's head.

When it did, Severus was so derailed, he… well, he had all the proper snide words floating around in his head, but he couldn't seem to get them out to his mouth. Severus could almost feel the curiosity levelled at him as he continued to fail to speak.

"… *Detention*," he finally snapped.

Potter just shrugged and continued to stare in a daze.

When class was over, Severus went inside the room where he kept his private potion ingredients and pulled out his old Muggle mobile phone. As he pondered how to word the message, he wondered which potion he'd sent over the years had finally done the job of re-growing Watson's missing organs.

So which one was it, the Cura Expus or Draught of Recovery?

Watson's reply was prompt as always:

No idea. But the empty vials always remind me you're not an utter bastard.

Final Notes : Thus ends POA. Phew. It bears little resemblance to my original plans, but hey! It worked.

I have no idea if detective sergeants are allowed to carry Tasers. As recently as 2008 the home secretary announced that 30,000 non-firearms officers would be allowed to carry them. If all else fails, call it dramatic license ™.

I have this idea of Sherlock and John fostering kids for emergency placement when Harry is off at Hogwarts. Those kids would later form the contemporary equivalent of Baker Street Irregulars (in addition to Sherlock's Homeless Network). I couldn't cover the idea here, but perhaps, after I gather the necessary info and find the time, I could write a side-story about it. Aaaaah the avalanche of ideas…

The Invitation

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Three: The Invitation

"Sirius Black, the Wizengamot declares you innocent of all charges."

Remus sat limply in relief as the entire court stood up in thunderous applause. Sirius was also slumped into the defendant's chair, like he couldn't prop himself up anymore.

And no wonder, for Sirius was now finally free to take up the only thing that sustained him through the long, harrowing days and weeks of his exoneration process: Harry's invitation to his London home, which he'd extended to Sirius inside the Shrieking Shack.

When Sirius turned himself in hours after Harry, Ron and Hermione had somehow found him, the Ministry didn't dare return him to Azkaban, not when there was a public outcry over injustice. So the Ministry allowed him to stay in the old ancestral home of the Blacks until his charges were thoroughly reinvestigated and his trial took place, provided he stayed under 24-hour guard. A good compromise, they thought, and it looked good on paper.

Except the old ancestral home of the Blacks, 12 Grimmauld Place, had gone derelict over the years, after all of its old occupants died. Doxies infested every curtain and drapery, and Boggarts made

home in almost every enclosed drawer, cabinet and wardrobe. The cobwebs were so old they'd practically developed their own life forms, and a damp, dusty, and sweetish, rotting smell pervaded everywhere. The existing décor lend no help whatsoever to improve the atmosphere: besides the grandfather clock that developed the unpleasant habit of shooting heavy bolts at passers-by, a murderous ghoul, and a purple curtain that almost strangled two hit-Wizards on guard duty, the portrait of Sirius's late mother, Walburga Black, which couldn't be removed, screamed: " *Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, freaks, begone from this place! How dare you befoul the house of my fathers!* " if someone so much as made a sound when they walked passed it-that is, if the person nearby wasn't Sirius, then the portrait howled: *"Yooou! Blood traitor, abomination, shame of my flesh!* "

Then there was the Blacks' old House-elf, Kreacher. The less one said about the ancient thing, the better.

Remus snapped back into attention when he heard the sound of jostling and moving bodies on top of the clapping. Amelia Bones had come down from her seat to present Sirius his old wand. Sirius took it with shaking hands. He conjured a couple of butterflies with it, and stared in a daze as he watched them flutter away.

Sirius was still staring at them when Remus came down and tapped him on his shoulder.

"Time to go, Padfoot," he whispered.

Sirius nodded as he stowed his wand deep inside his robe, "Yeah."

They made their way towards the exit, a difficult process because everyone wanted to shake hands with Sirius and congratulate him. Sirius took it well for the first three people, but became increasingly agitated as the number of witches and wizards who wanted to talk about his trial (and imprisonment) kept growing. Remus pushed Sirius ahead, muttering excuses to the crowd, moving well away from anyone who looked like a reporter.

They were stopped at the checkpoint just beyond the Atrium by a badly-shaved, thoroughly bored-looking security wizard in peacock-

blue robes.

"Where to?" he grunted.

"Baker Street," said Sirius slowly. "221B Baker Street. London."

"That's Muggle London," said the security wizard, checking a long roll parchment. "You need to go through Detective Chief Inspector Lestrade's Muggle attire inspection before you head out."

Remus and Sirius stared at him.

"Is this new regulation?" Remus asked.

"Well, yes," said the security wizard matter-of-factly. "The Muggles have upped their surveillance systems since 1994, so we're taking extra-precautions to ensure all ministry employees and visitors are *actually* incognito. You're in luck; he's here today."

The security wizard pointed at a silver-haired man dressed like a Muggle official striding purposefully towards the gates. Remus recognised him as the witness at Sirius's trial who presented the Muggle surveillance images that showed Sirius *hadn't* cast any spells when the Blasting Curse that killed twelve people had occurred. Remus had felt amazed when the gruff and solemn-looking man introduced himself as 'Detective Chief Inspector Lestrade from Muggle London's Law Enforcement', and had felt even more amazed when the man projected the images by magic without a wand in sight. A wizard capable of wandless magic, hitherto thought to be Grandmaster Shin's exclusive domain, working as a *Muggle Law Enforcement officer* ? Who would've thought?

Mr. Lestrade stopped right in front of Sirius and extended a hand.

"Congratulations, Mr. Black," he said, shaking Sirius's hand. "Heading off to Baker Street?"

Sirius nodded.

"I can take you there," said Mr. Lestrade, smiling affably. "You and your friend just need to look Muggle before you head out. The MoM

can set you two up if you don't have the right attire. Just follow me."

Mr. Lestrade led Sirius and Remus to a narrow door adjacent to the golden gates. Shelves of full shoes, and racks overflowing with Muggle clothing were inside the brightly lit room beyond door, which also had three full length mirrors.

"Why is the ministry going through all this trouble?" Remus asked, while Mr. Lestrade browsed through the racks.

"Partially my fault," said Mr. Lestrade ruefully. "I brought to Amelia Bones's attention that non-magic people have this thing called CCTV-security cameras. You lot can't afford to get yourself caught on tape looking and acting wizard, yeah? So the MoM updated their security policy. Mind, they wouldn't have gone this far if I didn't keep telling people: no, bloody hell, *no* you're not going to Muggle London dressed like that- unacceptable. Now I'm stuck doing *this* ."

"Are we really that bad?"

Mr. Lestrade let out a snort.

"I have a photo gallery of *shame* ; got more than a hundred of pictures in it. Me and the wife look through them when we want a good, long laugh."

Really bad then, Remus thought, as he accepted the tweed jacket Mr. Lestrade handed over to him.

They left the ersatz walk-in closet after Sirius finished dressing himself in a black leather jacket, white shirt and black trousers and Remus wore kakis and a brown chequered shirt under the tweed jacket Mr. Lestrade gave him (their shoes were acceptable). Mr. Lestrade, Remus and Sirius then walked down the long hallway where wizards and witches were arriving and departing through the multitude of gilded fireplaces. A few stopped and stared when Mr. Lestrade marched by. Remus thought he heard someone whisper the name *Lestrange* when they did so.

Sirius spoke for the first time since the security gate after the three of them squashed themselves inside the broken telephone booth

that served as the lift to and from the Ministry of Magic's visitor's entrance.

"Why are people calling you *Lestrange* ?" he asked brusquely.

"Because I am, technically," Mr. Lestrade replied. "You're pure-blood, yeah? Then you'd've at least heard about my father, Hamon Lestrange. He tossed me to the nearest Muggle girl when I tested negative for magic as a baby."

Sirius let out a bark-like laugh. "He would do that. But you must have magic if you're here. What happened?"

"Lost my magic temporarily after getting a blood transfusion and then got it back after donating blood for a couple of years. Don't ask, I don't understand it, either. I'm still new to magic; thought I was a Muggle until this wizard doctor told me I'm a wizard last year."

"It must've been a shock to you," said Remus.

"I'm still in denial," Mr. Lestrade declared. "I'm not a wizard. I just *happen* to have magic, which is not the same thing. And if I ever catch the berks who let it slip my last name used to be Lestrange, I'm going to commit some serious acts of police brutality against them."

Sirius warmed up considerably after Mr. Lestrade made his threat. The three of them awkwardly stepped out of the lift when they reached Muggle London. Sirius shot out like a loose Bludger. Remus, who left after Sirius, banged himself against the telephone apparatus on his way and winced.

Sirius took for a long moment to stare up at the sky above the dingy street that contained several shabby-looking offices, a pub and an overflowing skip. He looked as though he couldn't believe he was seeing it as a pardoned man. Mr. Lestrade and Remus shared a sad, knowing look and let Sirius stare as long as he liked.

They walked to the garage where Mr. Lestrade had parked his car after Sirius came to. Sirius took the front seat and Remus the back one on the right. Mr. Lestrade told them put on their seatbelts,

wearily showed them how when both Sirius and Remus just stared at him, expertly turned on the engine and started driving.

Sirius asked about Harry's adoptive parents on the way.

"Do you know them? What are they like?"

"I'm chummy with Harry's mum," said Mr. Lestrade. "We'd go for drinks at the Leaky Cauldron when we have time. Not lately since she's expecting. You'll like her. Just don't get tripped over by the name: it's John."

Sirius frowned at that. "Isn't that a…"

"Yes, it is. There's a story behind it."

Mr. Lestrade told them how Harry's new mum decided to rename herself John as a living memorial to her dead twin brother. Remus nodded in understanding after the tale. His mind conjured up a strong woman, standing military-straight with loose fists to the sides, whose calm expression hinted at the past memories both sad and glad.

"What about his adoptive father?" Sirius asked.

"I've known him for the last… g-d, it's been almost *eleven* years," said Mr. Lestrade, gaping slightly in disbelief. "He's hard to describe. He's both a boon and a pain in the backside to us police."

"He works for the Muggle Law Enforcement?"

"Not exactly. He calls himself a private consulting detective. The guys in the station and I ring him up when we're stuck with a funny case-as last resort, usually. Sometimes he invites himself to a case whether you like it or not."

"Ms. Jacqueline said he is bit of an eccentric," said Remus.

Mr. Lestrade rolled his eyes and huffed.

"My sister-in-law can't be mean even if you pay her. Sherlock is an eccentric, sure. He's also the biggest berk I've ever met. If he acts

like a tit, you have my permission to turn him into a toad."

Mr. Lestrade eventually parked his car in front of a café named Speedy's. Remus's stomach twisted into knots when he noticed the black door next to the café had the brass lettering *221B* . Sirius looked just as jittery at the sight of it.

"We're here," said Mr. Lestrade as he pulled the break.

Mr. Lestrade pressed the buzzer to 221B after everyone left his car. An old lady opened the door shortly. She and Mr. Lestrade exchanged pleasantries. From the short conversation, Remus gathered the old lady was Mrs. Hudson, who insisted she wasn't the housekeeper, but nevertheless she was going to bring up a cuppa because John shouldn't be moving around too much. She only mildly noted Sirius and Remus when they entered. Apparently she thought they were officers working under Mr. Lestrade.

The three of them climbed up a flight of stairs. Remus heard the faint sound of a violin playing. He briefly wondered who it was.

Then Mr. Lestrade opened the first floor's flat door like a man thoroughly at home.

There was a cluttered and yet spacious living room beyond the door. A person who had short blond hair and wearing a red cardigan, cream-coloured shirt and jeans was resting in the leather armchair next to the tiny fireplace. There was a noticeable swell around the person's abdomen, over which the cardigan stretched snuggly.

"How is everyone doing?" asked Mr. Lestrade, gesturing the person to remain sitting.

The person stood up, nevertheless. " *He's* in a good mood; been dancing on top of my new kidney for the last hour or so. *I've* been feeling like a beached whale deprived of tea."

"Isn't it okay to drink a cup or two?"

"I'm not risking it," said the person firmly. Then to Sirius and Remus, the person said: "Hi, I'm John Watson. I hope Lestrade didn't colour-code you two."

Remus only then realized that they were. "Uh… Remus Lupin."

"Sirius Black," grunted Sirius.

"Welcome. Lovely to see you," said John, smiling cheerfully as she shook their hands. "Please take a seat. Did Mrs. Hudson offer to make tea? Yes? Okay, then."

John sat heavily back into the leather chair. It was clear she was not used to the extra weight mostly distributed around the front. Remus gently prodded Sirius to sit on the red armchair across from John. Mr. Lestrade brought a chair from the kitchen, placed it next to the red armchair and gestured Remus to sit in it. Remus did so whilst acutely feeling the charged and awkward air that was slowly encroaching upon them.

"That's Harry playing," said John, pointing at the ceiling after everyone took a seat. "Sherlock's with him."

"Why aren't they coming down?" asked Mr. Lestrade.

"They can't hear us. I put a noise-cancelling paper charm on Harry's bedroom door. Sound can go inside-out, but not outside-in."

"Shouldn't it be the other way around?"

"The one time we did, Harry used the fact we can't hear him to skive off practicing."

Mr. Lestrade grinned knowingly.

"But Sherlock figured it out the moment he saw his fingers, yeah?" said Mr. Lestrade.

"Harry did try to make the right indent marks on his fingertips," said John. "But nope, it didn't pass Mr. Sherlock 'I-see-bloody-everything' Holmes's inspection: *though you've made indent marks on your fingertips, you have failed to make corresponding marks under your chin. Your hands also lack the smell of rosin. Try harder!* "

Sirius, Remus and Mr. Lestrade chuckled over Harry's failure to be sneaky. Meanwhile, John did something with a small, black device

that looked a lot like a Magical Mobile phone. Whatever it was, John only used her thumbs to do it.

"There. I just texted Sherlock and Harry; they should be here any moment now," said John after the last press.

Immediately the violin playing stopped. A noisy scuffling sound came from the floor above. A thunderous pall of feet clattering down the stairs rang the flat. The footsteps stopped right behind the closed door for a moment.

Then the door flew open and a tall and lean man, who had a mass of curly black hair, a long pale face, exotic cheekbones and the most lavishly accentuated upper lip, framed the doorway. The man's sharp blue-grey eyes raked over Remus and Sirius. Then he nailed his intense stare on Sirius, pointed a finger at him, and started marching towards his direction.

" *Sirius Black*," the man pronounced. "You MUST show me how an Animagus transformation is done."

John sighed heavily. "Yep, great introduction. Ta, Sherlock."

"Why bother, both of them know who I am already," said Mr. Holmes dismissively. "More importantly: what is the difference between a regular human-to-animal transfiguration and an Animagus transformation? Do you think differently when you're in your animal form for the latter? Is a wand required for Animagus transformation? I think not because you've done it without one. Come on, speak up, man!"

Sirius closed his gaping mouth. "Wait, what…?" he said weakly.

"Haven't you been listening? I've been asking you about Animagus transformations!" said Mr. Holmes, looking annoyed. "How long did it take you master the spell? When did you start training? What books did you reference?"

Remus noticed Harry waving at the doorway from the corner of his eye.

"Hi, Sirius! Hello Professor Lupin!" he piped.

" *Toad*," Mr. Lestrade reminded them. "Do it if he's too annoying. You don't have to change him back."

As it happened, neither Sirius nor Remus transfigured Sherlock Holmes into a toad or some other animal, despite Mr. Lestrade's repeated exhortation that they do before he left. For one thing, Sherlock's introduction and consequent behaviour seem to assure Sirius that nothing he did could possibly make Harry lose his regard for him. As John wryly put it, almost every word that came out of Sherlock's mouth had a subtextual invitation to punch him in the face, and it was very hard to beat that level of rudeness. At any rate, letting Sherlock take over had the effect of drawing Sirius out of himself and give him and Harry something to do *together* : namely, talking about the Animagus spell.

"So the clothes simply meld into the transformation, but certain vital items may manifest as markings," said Sherlock, his eyes gleaming.

"Yeah. Like, when James transformed into a stag, he had gold markings around the eyes, where his glasses should be," said Sirius.

Sherlock regarded Harry thoughtfully. "You might consider getting laser eye surgery before attempting this. It wouldn't do to manifest such obvious markings if you want to be discreet."

"But what if I turn into a black-furred green-eyed stag?" asked Harry.

"Augh, *magical intuition,* " Sherlock spat, like he was expunging something foul. "I'll never get the hang of it!"

Sirius and Harry shared a grin as Sherlock ranted over the unreasonableness of magic. Remus smiled faintly at the proceeding from his vantage point at the sitting room table, located between the twin windows. Now that Sirius had settled in and Mrs. Hudson had delivered the tea as promised, Remus was able to take in his surroundings. The décor was as eccentric as the man who lived here. The lamp hanging on the wall between the windows looked like a bull's head wearing white earmuffs, a yellow smiley-face was

painted on the adjacent wall, a skull poster adorned the same wall as the smiley-face, and a real human skull was sitting on the mantelpiece. Other odds and ends like Arabic oil lamps and Chinese calligraphy inkstones were sitting on the shelves behind him and a bundle of red chili-peppers were hanging on the kitchen doorpost.

"You're taking him very well," John remarked from the other side of the table.

"Well, he seems to doing Sirius a lot of good," said Remus, cradling his teacup.

John smiled. "Oddly enough, yeah, he is. It's a bit hard to stay inside your head when someone whose ego is as big as a black hole rolls into your personal space."

Remus tried very hard not to laugh. "Most would stay clear out of the way."

"Normally, yes, but I don't think he's ready for that yet," said John lightly, before turning sombre. "So from a scale of one to ten, how wretched has he been?"

Remus felt the smile on his face fade. "Your scale sounds a bit biased," he deflected.

"You know you give away a lot just from saying that," said John shrewdly. "I can tell he hasn't been sleeping much and his eating habits are still way out of whack. And the whole reinvestigation and exoneration process took, what, three months? That's a long time to wait alone in house-arrest, even if you sort-of-kind-of know the outcome. I also wonder how he is now after being rendered incapable of feeling anything positive for *twelve years* . The possible pathology alone gives me shivers. So: where is he on the scale?"

Remus looked down at his teacup. "I think he's been hoping to feel *something* once he meets Harry."

"Everything just feels flat, yeah?"

"He tries to act normal when I come to visit. And he does, as long as I don't stay too long. But if the visit goes longer than twenty

minutes…"

"He just runs out of steam," said John, understandingly. "You've got your work cut out for him."

Remus said nothing as he pondered the depths of his teacup.

"It's good you kept making contact," said John. "That would've assured him a lot. Did he get Harry's letters?"

"Yes," said Remus, looking up. "Those weekly invite reminders really helped; kept him from staying in a dark place for too long."

"It's always good to know someone remembers you," said John sagely. "You know, I've been thinking: Harry really needs a wizard godfather-possibly a squad of them, if you have any idea what he sometimes gets himself into. We can do most of the parenting, but there's stuff we simply can't *do* . Like, I'd love to go to the Quidditch world cup with him, but it'll take a very special clause to let me go. So why don't you three go and have some bonding time? I don't mind buying the tickets."

Remus felt his heart leap. "I couldn't possibly-"

"Just take some videos for me to watch later," said John, grinning. "I really, *really* want to see what a Quidditch match is like. I've been asking Snape to take videos for the last three freakin' years, but the bastard refuses to take them. Please be more reasonable."

Remus was momentarily derailed at the idea John was even in speaking terms with Snape. But then, he reasoned, a woman this lovely could probably manage it… *like Lily had.*

"Yes, of course," he stammered.

John beamed. "And maybe, when the time is right, you two can take Harry to his parents' grave site. I *know* he wants to go pay his respects, but we couldn't take him because we have no idea where it is. And even if we *did*…"

"… You may not be able to *see it*," said Remus sadly. "You know, I have never felt more keenly how unreasonable the Muggle-Magic

divide is."

"We're bit of an exception, if I were honest," said John, smiling wryly. "But for now let's work with what we have."

Just then a noisy scraping and rustling movement came from the other side of the living room. Remus and John looked up and saw Sirius in his dog form, Harry packing his whimsical messenger bag that proclaimed it contained 'a very large knife' among other ominous-sounding things, and Sherlock donning a coat that looked more suitable for winter than early summer.

"Where are you going?" asked John.

"Regents Park," said Sherlock as he buttoned his coat. "I want to determine how accurately Sirius can communicate with other dogs in his Animagus form."

"Oh, an outing! Great, let me get my jacket," said John, rising.

Sherlock's expression became slightly fixed. "Um, John, perhaps-"

"Six months pregnant, not lying on my death bed," said John sternly.

Sherlock pulled a deeply unhappy face, which didn't move John at all. Nevertheless something did make John pause.

"Wait, doesn't Harry have violin lessons in thirty minutes?"

"Cancel it," said Sherlock immediately.

Harry eagerly pulled out his phone to comply, but something on it made him stop.

"… She already did," he said in palpable astonishment.

Sherlock and John turned to stare at him incredulously.

"Perhaps she had an unexpected engagement?" said Remus, while dog-Sirius titled his head to the side in curiosity.

"Miss Jackie *never* cancels appointments," said Harry.

"Only death, unconsciousness or forced immobilization will stop her from keeping them," Sherlock rumbled.

"And lately she doesn't even let the latter two stop her," said John. "Case in point: she had three doppelgangers running around doing her jobs while her real-self was *petrified* after indirect exposure to a bloody *basilisk* ."

Now it was Remus and Sirius's turn to gape stupidly as the statement sunk in.

"Such dedication," said Remus with feeling.

"Bloody bone-headed stubbornness, that's what I call it," John growled whilst texting. "Jack, what's going on?"

John frowned more deeply when her phone pinged a few moments later.

" ' *The number you're trying to reach is temporarily out of service* '? Jack, where the hell are you?"

Dr. Robert Ransom, more widely known as Robert D. Ju, was well known for his skills as a surgeon and alarmingly accurate insight into people (as well as his disinclination to do anything uplifting with the latter knowledge unless a patient was involved). Since his return from a prolonged stay at Great Britain, many noticed the gift that made him famous became even more acute. Just recently, he successfully operated on the key witness of a shooting case, who had a bullet lodged in his brain in such a way all the other doctors threw their hands up in defeat and made the district court temporarily move quarters and hold session in the witness's hospital room. The witness survived the operation and his prognosis was excellent. As one reporter put it, Dr. Ju's skills were practically *witchcraft.*

However, those who were in the know, those who worked closely with Dr. Ju, knew that even the knowledge that he had succeeded where all the others had failed, and that the medical community had

re-embraced him again, was insufficient to rouse him from the state of gloom he'd fallen into since his return.

"You're not asking me about my wellbeing because you care about it," said Robert tonelessly when his director asked how he was doing. "You're asking me because you're wondering how my current state is affecting my performance. Don't worry. It's not going down."

Questionably altruistic motives aside, the director had good reasons to ask about Robert's wellbeing. When not in the operating theater, Robert was listless and silent, often found staring sadly out of a window. If one were to ask his friend Tim, he would've said the only time Robert was this devastated was when he returned from Europe many years ago, after breaking up with his first and only girlfriend/ fiancée.

On this particular day, across the Atlantic the wizarding world was celebrating justice belatedly served, while in the USA the day had been shaping up no different than the others; just another end of a long shift at the hospital and a very morose Robert Ju.

Then his cell phone rang. His colleagues were far more surprised at the fact that he *had* a cell phone than at the fact he was talking to someone *on* a cell phone, because Robert was infamous for his resistance towards electronics. They, therefore, weren't paying attention to the first part of the conversation. By the time they thought to eavesdrop, Robert was already beyond hearing range.

"Hello Robert," said a soft voice.

Robert's expression transformed the moment he recognized the voice. His face beheld mixture of terrible sadness-and desperate hope.

"Hi Jacqueline," he said croakily.

"I… wanted to apologise," said Jacqueline, "For cutting you off so suddenly. A friend of mine pointed out that - abruptness aside - you didn't act inappropriately considering the facts. It was I who reacted badly. I'm sorry."

Robert let out a mirthless chuckle. "It's alright, I'm always awkward."

"Can I hire you again?"

Robert swallowed dry-mouthed several times. He looked as though he was on the verge of saying something he knew he shouldn't say.

"That… wouldn't be very… *appropriate*, now, would it?" he whispered.

"No," said Jacqueline quietly. "But I can I talk to you?"

"In person?"

"Yes."

"Where are you? When can I meet you?" asked Robert as he walked swiftly down the hall.

"I'm in front of a bayside restaurant called Harris Crab House."

"… You're in *MD!* ?"

"I had a sudden urge for Chesapeake blue crab," said Jacqueline shyly.

Robert broke into a wide smile. "I'll be there in fifteen minutes," he promised.

"Okay. See you soon."

The call disconnected with a click.

Robert stuffed his phone back into his pocket and broke into a run.

Final Notes : As I pondered what other ugly things Robert would possess, I thought he would totally drive an ugly car. Like the Nissan Cube, which one of the ugliest cars I've ever seen. Here is a snippet of dialogue that didn't make the cut:

" *Robert*," said Jacqueline. "Your car looks like a shiny, misshapen

icebox propped on wheels. I feel ashamed just looking at it."

"It's a Nissan Cube."

"Why is it called 'Cube'? Nothing about this car reminds me of a cube."

I made the Dementor after-effects a bit more serious for Sirius. Mostly because I think it would be highly unlikely he'd abruptly turn normal after feeling nothing but despair and anger for twelve years. Hagrid was only there for about a month in ASIM (two in Canon) and so what he describes in POA, chapter 11, would not apply to Sirius (" *Yeh can' really remember who yeh are after a while. An' yeh can' really see the point o' livin' at all. I used ter hope I'd jus' die in me sleep. When they let me out, it was like bein' born again, ev'rythin' came floodin' back, it was the bes' feelin' in the world* ."). In many ways, the first time Harry was able to interact with post-Azkaban Sirius on a long-term basis was at OOTP. Before that, their meetings were always short, with more urgent agendas at hand, and no time for relationship building. The realism in which JK dealt with the issue, which angered me at the first read right after OOTP came out, now makes me very sad and pained.

The Importance of Meaning

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Four: The Importance of Meaning

Exactly fifteen minutes after the call, Robert quietly appeared in front of a blue wood panelled building situated right next to a small pier. A young woman wearing an outfit of whites and charcoal greys was standing at the parking lot, studying the restaurant's cartoon logo of a blue-capped seaman holding a red crab of truly monstrous proportions. She twitchily looked back when Robert hovered behind her.

The two of them stared at each other for a long time, both at lost what to do next.

"Want to go inside?" asked Robert eventually, scratching the back of his head.

"Okay," said Jacqueline, looking down and glowing pink.

They wordlessly walked inside the restaurant. Jacqueline wrinkled her nose at the strong smell of seafood and grease. The waitress at the front led them to a small table next to one of the large windows and asked what they wanted to drink. Both Jacqueline and Robert ordered water and stared at brown wrapping paper covered table.

"What do you like to order?" asked Robert, picking up the menu.

"I never ate whole crab before," Jacqueline confessed. "My brother Jason usually makes bisque with them."

"So you probably don't know how to de-shell a crab."

"… There's a way to do it?"

"There's a way to do it *fast* without cutting yourself," Robert explained. "Uh, don't worry, I can show you how…"

They spent the next few minutes belabouring over the menu, debating the merits of fried crab cake verses broiled crab cake. Throughout the process, neither of them looked up to see the other in the eye. They eventually decided to order the crab basket, though Jacqueline warned Robert she'd probably not be able to finish even the snow crabs, which she happened to like, let alone the soft shell crab and Dungeness crab that was included.

Robert and Jacqueline studied their table after placing the order for another long while.

"So how did you get here?" asked Robert as he contemplated the box of Old Bay seasoning.

"I so rarely want to eat anything, my family members go to absurd lengths to provide when I ask for something," said Jacqueline, turning pink again. "I, um, asked my brother Jason during the lunch hour rush if I could have *Maryland* crab. He Apparated me here immediately."

Robert stared a bit. "He can do *transcontinental Apparition* on a short notice?"

"There's very little he won't do for food."

"Wow."

There was another awkward pause.

"Obviously, I was-" Robert started.

"Robert, I-" said Jacqueline at the same time.

The two both stopped and stared at each other.

Then Jacqueline puffed out her cheeks.

" *Why*," she said almost petulantly, "does that dreaded 'R' word make everything so *difficult* ?"

"Probably because there's so much at stake," Robert mumbled. "It's worse when you've never had a proper one before."

"You don't count your *engagement* to J as proper?"

"I was pretty much letting her do everything she wanted. That's not proper."

"That's *horrible*," said Jacqueline with much feeling. "Why did you?"

"Let her do anything?" Robert asked.

" *Yes* !"

"I didn't know what the boundaries were," said Robert, scratching his neck. "It's not like Hailey-J to you-wanted to have sex after the second date or something."

Jacqueline cringed and shuddered at the same time. "Don't mind me, I just… I don't like talking about it."

"It's okay, I'm the king of Awkward," said Robert, grinning lopsidedly. "You can't possibly do or say something I'll find awkward because I've probably done it already and have done it *worse* ."

"I know," sighed Jacqueline. "I'm not worried about offending you. I only worry that I'll fail to do what is *right* . For this… conversation to go well, I realise we must be open and honest. But *I don't know how this looks like exactly* . I hate not knowing what to do."

"You don't do well with failure, do you?" said Robert knowingly. "Well, you have questions. Why don't you ask them and we can go from there."

"And you don't have questions for me?" Jacqueline quipped.

"If I had them, I forgot what they were, like, twenty minutes ago."

Jacqueline scowled.

"Fine," she said tartly. "Robert, why… why did you… why do you…" she made a tiny noise of distress and turned so red a waiter looked at her with concern. "… No, I can't say it. Your thought-hearing; are you using it?"

"I can't turn it off," said Robert, blinking. "How did you know?"

"When you answer to words spoken behind *noise-cancelling screens*, Robert, there are only two explanations: the noise-cancelling charms are not working or you are using thought hearing spells. The noise-cancelling charms were in perfect working order. Therefore, by process of elimination, you are using thought-hearing spells."

Robert gaped a little. "I thought they were just there to divvy up the space; I heard the instrument sounds."

"You were probably hearing the music the student was making inside their heart."

"Need to keep in mind when someone decides to sing inside his head," Robert muttered. "You better look at this."

Robert unbuttoned the top button of his pink shirt that had large, white and black half-moon patterns, put his right hand under the left side of the collar and tiled his head the other way.

There, on the crook between his neck and shoulder, was a small ornate tattoo, growing red under his hand.

"… *Who did that to you?* " growled Jacqueline in a low voice.

Robert blinked at her briefly. "You're very angry."

"That thing is a *curse*, Robert! Designed to drive the victim *mad* with the thoughts they will hear in close proximity to other people! Isn't

the sound of all the thinking deafening to you here?"

"I've learned to live with it," said Robert as he withdrew his hand. "You can't take it off."

"Who put it on you?" asked Jacqueline again.

"He's dead."

"It doesn't matter. *I want to know* ."

"Doe Hae *seunim*," confessed Robert. "I was a bit psychotic when I was a kid. I decked his head with a log once when he was supposedly in a state of *mu nyum mu sang* because I wanted to know if he really had joined the emptiness (mu), therefore above thought and consciousness. It didn't occur to me his body might still get hurt. He put it on me to give me a sense of empathy that I was clearly lacking."

"How old were you?"

"Six? Seven? I don't know how old I am exactly. I only know it was about twenty-eight years ago."

Jacqueline leaned her head against her left hand, resting the corner of her left eyebrow on top of the fingers.

"I can see how it happened," she said, fuming quietly. "I can even picture myself doing it, if pressed to the limits to my patience. But what he did to you was *wrong* ."

"He certainly regretted it when I became even more psychotic afterwards," said Robert. "He taught me a way to cope when he couldn't find a cure. I can turn down the influence to a bare whisper up to thirty hours, but it takes a lot of concentration, so I only use it at work."

"Hence, your 'switch'," said Jacqueline. "Your inability to act like a normal human being except on a phone makes *perfect* sense." She sighed a little. "Is that why you broke up with J?"

"Ah, no," said Robert, blinking gormlessly. "At the risk of sounding

like a sparkly vampire, Hailey was one of the few people I couldn't hear much except what they were actually saying. The other persons are you, Dumbledore and Snape. I actually found this unsettling rather than 'ohmygoshIloveyou'."

"Knowing what the other person is *really* thinking does have its advantages," said Jacqueline, smiling crookedly.

"And it helped me *really* consider what I was doing before it was too late," said Robert. "Let me ask you this: do you have something or someone that you can't live without? A something or someone you love so dearly, should it vanish or proven false your entire life would collapse?"

Jacqueline just looked at Robert for a moment with a tiny frown wrinkling her eyebrows.

"… There are a lot of ways to answer that question," she said eventually. "But can you first tell me what is yours so I can get an idea what kind of answer you are expecting?"

Robert smiled faintly. "Of all the people who wanted to start something with me, you and Hailey were the only ones who even bothered to ask me that."

"So what is your answer?" Jacqueline repeated.

"For me it is Jesus," Robert replied. "When I said that to Hailey she gave me the side-eye; didn't understand."

Jacqueline drew back with her lips parting as the statement sank in. The smile on Robert's face grew as she did so.

"How can you share your life with someone who doesn't understand why the most important person in your life is so important to you?"

When the waitress came to deliver an order of crab basket to Jacqueline and Robert, the former was playfully criticizing the latter's shirt, and the latter was grinning stupidly back. The rest of their meal had the same kind of easy air about it, Robert dismantling crabs with

practiced skill as he told Jacqueline people kept gifting him clothes in hopes he would stop dressing himself so badly and Jacqueline declaring they were solving the problem the wrong way as she forked the crab meat Robert heaped into tiny piles.

After Jacqueline ate far more than just snow crab legs-and Robert still consuming most of the basket's contents-the two walked out to the pier.

"How are you going back to England?" asked Robert.

"Jason is picking me up."

"Should I leave before he gets here?"

"I can't hide you from him," said Jacqueline. "And if you can't even gain *Jason's* approval, it won't work, whatever it is we want to start."

" *We* ?" said Robert, grinning.

"Takes two to tango, as the cliché goes," said Jacqueline serenely.

A few minutes later a tall, broad-shouldered young man silently walked out from behind the small ice cream shop next to Harris Crab House. He didn't look out of place where Muggles were enjoying the early summer afternoon at the bay, wearing an old bucket hat, ragged cargoes and a threadbare red T-shirt. The only thing that differentiated him from the others was that he had appeared out of thin air only a moment ago without even a pop of displaced air.

Jason Shin frowned at his sister. He then looked at the strange man next to her and raised an eyebrow in question.

"I think I'm going to start dating him," said Jacqueline, pointing at Robert. "Do you mind?"

Jason was completely galvanized. " *What*… When did… *Who* are *you!* ?" he cried, flapping his hands.

"Your sister," said Jacqueline.

"Robert Ransom," said Robert, waving twitchily. "I work in this dinky

little hospital in the middle of ghetto Baltimore called Johns Hopkins."

Jason opened and closed his mouth. Then he thought for a moment.

"What have you been feeding her?" he demanded.

"Just now, six snow crab legs, two whole Dungeness crabs and half of a soft-shell crab," said Robert. "You need to check her for allergies from a wizard healer specialist, by the way. Magic reacts differently to allergens."

Jason shook his head in disbelief as he gave Robert the thumbs up.

"I approve. He's a winner, nuna."

Harry had wondered what his teachers did over the summer holidays. He amused himself once for a moment, picturing Dumbledore, with his long silver beard, full-length wizard's robes, and pointed hat, stretched out on a beach somewhere, rubbing suntan lotion onto his long crooked nose. Then he shook his head to banish the mental image before it gave him sympathetic heatstroke.

Then he found out what Dumbledore did occasionally a few days after Miss Jackie cancelled an appointment on her own initiative for the first time in living memory. He and Sherlock were all geared up to ask her what happened as they headed to Miss Jackie's home at the University towns for his rescheduled violin lessons.

And there, sitting cross-legged at the low table, across from Mr. Shin, was Albus Dumbledore.

Harry just stared stupidly for a moment, wildly noting Dumbledore was wearing a familiar-looking suit of plum velvet and that there was a Wizard chess set between them (the black Queen was wrestling a white Rook off the board). Dumbledore smiled at them both.

"Ah, good morning, Harry and Sherlock," he said, looking up at them through his half-moon glasses with a most satisfied expression. "It has been a long time since I've seen you two together. Excellent,

excellent."

For another wild, random moment, Harry wondered what the late Vernon Dursley would say to that. Whatever it would have been, Harry was sure his words would threaten rudeness in every syllable as he decided any man who could look at Harry and say "excellent" was a man with whom he could never see eye to eye.

"Social visit, not the first one either," concluded Sherlock, looking intently at the two old men.

Mr. Shin snorted and Dumbledore beamed.

"Your deductions are as accurate as ever," said Dumbledore pleasantly. "I assume you have concluded the number of my visits from the wear patterns of my one and only Muggle suit, though I wonder how you deduced this is the only one I own. How is John?"

"A non-frivolous academic man like you has no reason to own more than one all-purpose suit. John is doing well, thank you, though complaining a lot more now that Hamish is getting more active."

"Goodness, you're going to name your son *Hamish* ?"

"It's my provisional name," said Sherlock gravely. "John insists on calling him Benedict."

"What a lovely name," said Dumbledore in approval. "And you, Harry? Are you airing out your overstuffed brain?"

"… I wish, sir," said Harry, suddenly finding his voice. "Sherlock's expanding his detective agency and I've been helping him. It takes a lot of brainwork."

"This is for Benedict, I assume."

Harry shrugged noncommittally. "He's taking more small, less-interesting cases. I look over them and try to solve them. Sherlock reviews my results."

"You're getting better," said Sherlock, nodding once. "You have the power of observation and that of deduction. You're only wanting in

knowledge, and that may come in time."

Harry felt himself go hot in the face as he looked down, feeling extremely pleased.

"How about Sirius? How is he keeping himself occupied?" asked Dumbledore.

Harry and Sherlock shared a look as they started to chuckle uncontrollably.

"John created a job for him," said Sherlock between his rumbles. "He's enjoying it very much."

"Has it any relation to your expanding business operations?"

"Perhaps."

Dumbledore stroked his bushy moustache as he studied Harry and Sherlock with twinkling eyes.

"Under what circumstances did the job come about?" he asked.

"A rather interesting one," Sherlock replied. "I really can't say more."

Sherlock and Harry left the living room right after this, Harry citing his violin lessons and Sherlock to just leave. However, Harry had feeling Dumbledore had a very good idea what the 'interesting circumstances' were…

The first time Sirius Black met Mycroft Holmes, he turned him into a pig.

He thought himself thoroughly justified because the man had the nerve to kidnap him off the street. After a botched attempt to have drinks with Remus and Lestrade at the Leaky Cauldron, Sirius had been dejectedly walking back to Baker Street and the public phones kept ringing along the way. He finally gave in and entered the closest telephone booth to pick up the phone. The voice on the other end simply said: *get into car, Mr. Black* . He was quickly stuffed

inside a black car by two burly, black suited men, and then taken to an abandoned warehouse where a smartly dressed Muggle man leaning on an umbrella stood, waiting. The moment Sirius stepped out of the car he transfigured the man into a pig and Apparated to Baker Street directly.

Sherlock bemoaned the lack of video evidence of the event after laughing for over a minute when Sirius told him what happened. John informed Sirius who the man was after giggling for a long time.

"There is something seriously wrong with your brother," Sirius said, glowering.

"It's a family trait," said John. "Go and change him back. He's the British Government. We can't have a pig embodying our government; bad for Queen and Country."

"Do I have to?" Sirius groused. "If he's the British Government, he probably has a squad of wizards working for him illegally already."

"Considering your kind's attitude towards non-magicals, doubtful," said Sherlock. "And don't go just yet. Let him suffer."

"Don't listen to him," said John sternly. "Just hurry up and go. You're just going to make things harder for yourself the longer you stall."

Sirius huffed and Disapparated. He returned a minute later and reported Mycroft Holmes, aka British Government, was his original priggish self. A female agent tried to kill him after he de-transfigured Mycroft, but he avoided the attempt just fine-in fact, it was a nice to risk his life and limb for a change. It was very exciting.

"Bored with your mandatory mucking around having PTSD, aren't you?" John commented.

"Oh, yeah," said Sirius, thinking about the long, empty hours lounging inside the wizard tent John had set up on the roof for his temporary residence because there was no way in hell he'd go back to Grimmauld Place for Kreacher's lovely company after suffering months of it. Harry visited him daily and vice versa, but-dammit!- Harry had his own life, his own friends, to spend his time on.

"I heard you were exceptionally bright as a student," John went on.

"One of the best," Sirius replied.

"Quite the troublemaker too."

"Yes."

"You're used to working around the rules, then, being a rebel?"

"Of course. Yes. All my life, pretty much."

John grinned. "I've got a job for you. Are you interested?"

"Oh, Merlin, *yes*," said Sirius, grinning back.

The job John had in mind was that of a general utility man for Sherlock's private detective enterprise. In the past, Sherlock worked closely with John for most of his cases, but doing legwork together was no longer possible due to John's pregnancy. Sherlock refused another partner, saying they were either worthless or else biased, and John didn't want him to work alone because Sherlock had a tendency to turn stupid in the dumbest way possible at the heat of the moment (John's words exactly). The compromise they reached- after a lot of shouting- was delegating the routine legwork to agents, with Sherlock focusing on brainwork unless the case required personal touch. Being a wizard and an experienced prankster made Sirius well suited for the routine business of gathering data for Sherlock. For the small cases, he got to work with Harry. For the cases that garnered Sherlock's interest, Sirius worked with Remus and Lestrade to collect the requested data. When he returned to Baker Street to report, Harry and John joined and listened to Sherlock's deductions with rapt attention.

It was like having James and Lily back again, except not really.

"You're acclimatizing to the non-magic world amazingly well," John remarked after Sirius managed to collect a target's whereabouts for the last three months in less than twelve hours.

Sirius shrugged. "I have a strong incentive."

"Don't like the notoriety?" said Sherlock, too accurately.

"Yeah, whatever," said Sirius dismissively, but inwardly he shuttered.

Because it was true; the attention he received whenever he braved the Leaky Cauldron or Diagon Alley was suffocating and often plain frightening. He didn't know why. He used to revel at attention. It was as if the Dementors had sucked away his old personality and left a broken echo that was never to be restored.

"What do you do when you don't know how to act like a Muggle?" Harry asked.

"I pretend to be foreign," said Sirius. "Locals are generally helpful to explain. I work from there."

"Are most of the locals you talk to young women?"

Sirius looked away, grinning. "Maybe."

"You *dog*," said John with mock-disapproval. "If only wizards were sensible like you."

"I'm a rare breed," said Sirius proudly.

Sirius talked Remus into doing a flat share with him in 221C after working for Sherlock about a month, convincing his old mate that he *should* pay most of the rent since Remus was going to spend most of his time at Hogwarts. Mrs. Hudson the landlady was delighted to find someone to lease the old, dilapidated basement flat and happily supplied tea and biscuits when Sirius and Remus started moving in.

"You won't need another bedroom, I suppose," said Mrs. Hudson as she deposited a tray.

"Why do you ask that?" said Remus, frowning.

"In case you're nervous," said Mrs. Hudson. "You don't have to worry, you know. We have all sorts around here. Mrs. Turner next door got *married ones* ."

Neither Remus nor Sirius understood what she meant. They only hoped Mrs. Hudson wasn't talking about wizard and witches in an interspecies relationship, because that would've posed a serious problem. For one thing, John and Harry had declared a blanket ban against using memory charms on the dear old lady, and Sirius was certain John was absolutely serious about taking a gun at him should he fail to comply.

Thus Sirius spent his days, rarely bored or unproductive. Before he knew it, Harry's birthday was almost at hand.

Sirius was contemplating what to get him when he arrived at the crime site Lestrade called him to. He noticed most of the officers were outside the building rather than in, where the crime presumably happened.

"You again?" said Detective Inspector Sally Donovan.

"Just a hapless grunt, following orders," Sirius whined playfully, raising both hands, "and what are you complaining about, you don't have to deal with him."

"I'm starting to miss his freakishness," said Donovan as she lifted the tape to let Sirius in. "But don't tell him that."

"Sure, anything for you," said Sirius, winking.

Donovan huffed. "So where's your *boyfriend* ?"

"Working on his lesson plans," said Sirius mournfully. "He really wants to up the ante of his… A-level classes."

"So hardworking and dedicated," said Donovan in exaggerated dreaminess. "Now that's a guy I can dig for."

Sirius put on an appropriately disappointed face as Donovan alerted Lestrade of his presence over a walkie-talkie. The head SOCO, Anderson, glared at him as he suited up. They didn't exchange any words besides cursory grunts.

Lestrade was alone on the middle floor, studying a body of a little girl with his arms crossed and a grave expression on his face. Sirius

closed his eyes briefly at the sad sight. The girl couldn't have been older than ten, and, except for the flies roaming around her long eyelashes, looked like she was sleeping, tucked under a thin blue blanket that had pony patterns and holding a stuffed white unicorn doll as she was.

"Hasn't been that long," said Lestrade without a greeting, "Couldn't have been, not in this summer weather. I didn't see any obvious signs of beating, but I have a feeling the perp dumped the body out of guilt."

"Why do you think it's guilt?"

"The perp took the trouble of covering the girl under a blanket and tucking her favourite stuffed animal. If this was just a regular body dump, the perp wouldn't have done that."

"So it might have been an accident."

Lestrade sniffed. "If killing a child is ever an accident."

Sirius looked away. "So what am I here to do?"

"Donovan and her team are having a devil of time entering; keep remembering nonexistent urgent appointments whenever they get too close."

"Sounds like a Muggle-repelling charm."

"I thought so too, when I had no trouble getting in," said Lestrade. "I'm not up to cancelling that kind of spells yet. There's also a chance the wizard who set it up is the perp, but I'd rather not get the MoM involved unless I absolutely have to. This is Sally's case, not mine. No copper wants a case taken from them."

"Okay," said Sirius, pulling his wand out.

He quietly searched through the building. He snorted when he found a grubby looking wizard on the top floor, sleeping under a cloak propped on sticks.

"Oi, Dung!" he called out. "You're squatting on top of a crime scene!"

"… Huh, what, no! I didn' do nuthin'!" squawked Mundungus Fletcher, jerking awake.

"Yeah right," Sirius sneered. "You're lucky the Muggle law enforcement liaison is a decent bloke, because you'd've been hauled over to a Muggle jail long ago if he weren't. Now move out before you really get arrested."

Mundungus Apparated away, grumbling and taking his improvised tent with him. Sirius cancelled the Muggle repelling charm and returned downstairs.

"Found a wizard squatting upstairs," said Sirius. "He's not the perp. I know him. He doesn't have kids to beat."

"Good to know," Lestrade grunted. "Is the spell gone?"

"Yep, I got rid of it."

"Thanks. Appreciate it."

Lestrade and Sirius left the building together. Donovan and her team entered shortly afterwards, Donovan thanking Lestrade on her way in. Lestrade told Donovan to take good care of the girl as he left.

"I'd offer to drive you back, but I have to go the Ministry," said Lestrade after they were a good distance away. "Hey, you like Quidditch?"

"Love it," said Sirius, looking at him curiously.

"I've got more tickets to the Quidditch World Cup finals than I know what to do with. Want some?"

"Want some? Hell, yeah, I do!" Sirius exclaimed. "How did you get them? They're supposed to cost a sackfull of Galleons each!"

"Did the guys at Magical Games and Sports a huge favour," said Lestrade, grinning. "Everyone was at their wits end trying to figure out how they're going to host the world cup incognito. Their department head was just brushing the issue aside, saying the deserted moor they'd selected would keep everyone well hidden, but

you need an excuse for why a hundred thousand magic-people are heading to an empty moor, yeah? I gave them the perfect cover."

Sirius was intrigued. "What is it?"

Lestrade's grin broadened.

"I told them to rent out all the surrounding camp sites for the *International Magic World Enactment Festival* ."

Sirius almost collapsed to the ground laughing.

"Is that brilliant or what?" crowed Lestrade. "Now everyone can look and talk as wizard as they like, and the camp managers would think they're just being in character."

"That was *genius*," said Sirius fervently.

"Thank you. So how many do you want?"

"Three," said Sirius eagerly. "Thanks a lot, Lestrade. This is going to be the *perfect* gift for Harry."

"Oh, yeah, it's coming up, innit?" said Lestrade, pulling out a thick bundle of parchment tickets. "Are you planning something special?"

"Can't beat watching the Quidditch World Cup finals," said Sirius, pocketing the tickets Lestrade gave him.

"No, I guess not. Okay I better go. See ya."

They parted ways. On his way back to Baker Street, Sirius heard his Muggle mobile phone ping.

Get Thai on your way back. SH

Sirius snorted as he carefully pecked up his response:

Fine. Anything else, your Lordship?

Sherlock texted back immediately.

John wants iced Chai Tea. Harry requests Pad Kee Mao. SH

Sirius dutifully stopped by at Mr. Pran's tiny Thai restaurant to pick up the requested food. He was wondering if Remus would like to try Chinese beer when someone walked up to him, tapping his umbrella.

"Good evening, Mr. Black," said a familiar supercilious voice.

Sirius immediately reached for his wand as he turned to face Mycroft Holmes, who was as poshly dressed as he'd last seen him. Mycroft didn't even have the decency to look surprised. He merely smirked and slowly spread a hand around him, reminding Sirius he was in Muggle London, where he *must* stay incognito least a hidden camera record his actions.

"That's better," said Mycroft in smug satisfaction as Sirius drew back his hand but not his wand. "I should also mention to prevent you from taking, *ah*, aggressive measures against me, I've taken some insurance."

"Like what?" Sirius demanded.

"I had the entire incident taped. Rather embarrassing, but quite necessary. You don't want the video leaked, now, do you?"

Sirius glared at the man for a long time.

"What do you want?"

"This isn't a good place to talk."

Sirius stubbornly planted his feet. "Your brother is expecting me back soon. You know how he's like."

"Considering I've known him since he was a squalling, red-faced infant, yes, I do," said Mycroft. "Do come along, Mr. Black. I shan't delay you for long."

Sirius rolled his eyes.

" *Fine.* You'd better pick up the tab, too."

Final Notes : When I was crafting Robert's character, I wasn't even thinking about Twilight. Having not read it (and never will), I don't know what it involves except some vague factoids I heard from the other people who had. The telepathy and sparkling properties I learned after I finished crafting Robert, and I decided neither applied. Robert is *Awkward King* in human flesh. He needs all the help he can get, including telepathy (even with it he fails!).

Merry Christmas!

Strange Family Relations

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Five: Strange Family Relations

Sirius followed Mycroft to the black car parked just outside the restaurant. He was then driven somewhere for what felt like hours. He had no idea where he was going; all the passenger windows were opaque, and he was completely segregated from the driver and Mycroft, who had taken the front passenger seat. Sirius tried to text Sherlock, but his phone had trouble connecting to the network. So he played Crossword instead to stave off his boredom.

The car eventually came to a stop some uncounted time later. Someone opened the door for him. Sirius stepped out and found himself in an underground parking garage. Armed, uniformed men were guarding all exits. Sirius could almost taste the tenseness in the air. Whether it was because of the facility or because his presence, he couldn't tell.

Mycroft led Sirius to an exit guarded by two harsh looking men holding machine guns. The burly man who opened the car door walked closely behind Sirius from the car to the exit. Mycroft handed over an ID card, and the guard did the usual scanning and checking, though he did ask Mycroft to place his eyes on what looked like a pair of binoculars. He let Mycroft and Sirius through the gate after verifying. The man who followed them stayed behind.

An oppressively grey hallway lay beyond the checkpoint door. The circular overhead lights were dim and sparsely placed on the ceiling. Occasionally Sirius thought he spied a tiny camera lens. They met no one along the way and no noise filtered through the walls. All they heard was the sound of their footsteps. Mycroft strode briskly like a man who had regular official business at the premises, and didn't have a wizard following after him.

Mycroft stopped in front of a metal door that looked solidly locked. He swiped a different ID-card through the card scanner and the little red light on the scanner turned green. The door clicked and slid to the side.

Another long grey hall lay beyond the door. The lights were dimmer here and walls were narrower. Sirius wondered if his movements were being spied by those infrared cameras John once mentioned.

The hall ended at another metal door. It looked no different from a regular door of its sort, often found in parking garages and fire emergency exits. Mycroft merely pushed the door open and walked in. Sirius followed him.

He found himself in a darkened room. Only one light was on, and it was just strong enough to illuminate the ceiling just around it. Sirius heard nothing but the quiet movement of fabric as Mycroft moved, presumably.

Then, abruptly without warning, another light turned on a little distance away. Sirius blinked at the sudden onslaught of illumination. As he did so, he noticed there was someone else inside the room, behind a glass wall.

Then Sirius gasped.

It was almost like staring at a mirror, except the man on the other side of the glass wasn't actually him. The man's matted black hair, parchment-thin skin, sunken cheeks and deep-set eyes were just like his, when memories of Azkaban was close to the surface. At the moment, the man was looking down and appeared far too gone inside his head to take notice.

Then the man slowly looked up.

Sirius shivered when he caught a glimpse of black eyes from beneath the shadows. For a brief moment, he saw the insanity peering out from the flint coloured orbs that so much resembled the eyes of a shark.

Sirius turned away and started at Mycroft.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"I will enlighten you once you verify whether or not that man possesses your power," said Mycroft.

Sirius raised his eyebrow at that.

"Why do you need to know?"

"It is a matter of vital importance."

" *Why* is it so important?

"Do you really want to know? It could mean too much involvement to you, and who knows what that might entail?"

Sirius glared at Mycroft. "And forcing me here isn't too much involvement already? You've forced my hand since the beginning. So why should I answer you?"

" *Feisty*," said Mycroft, lips curling. "I could always threaten you with the video recording of your indiscretion."

"What if I don't give a damn?" Sirius asked defiantly.

Mycroft's lips curled even more. "A hint then: He is the man responsible for your godson's change in guardianship."

Sirius's eyes went wide this time. John had briefed him and Remus how she and Sherlock ended up as Harry's adoptive parents. There was a name often mentioned in the unbelievable tale. A shockingly ordinary name…

"… *Jim*," he whispered.

"Yes," said Mycroft. "Dear Jim. Now…"

Mycroft jerked his nose at the prisoner. Sirius turned his attention to Jim Moriarty, former Consulting Criminal.

He didn't agree with the description John wrote on the blog, except superficially. The man John described was a deceptively average-looking man, capable of extreme and volatile displays of emotion, all of which sounded hallow and fake. There was a definite brokenness about the man that spoke of a vital quality that was missing. Whether the years of captivity had taken it away or he'd never had it to begin with, one couldn't say. Sirius wondered what it said about him when he felt rough sympathy for the man.

"You kept him since the Zoo bombing?" asked Sirius.

"Correct," said Mycroft.

Sirius nodded as he discreetly took out his wand. What he knew about the man and Mycroft made him feel almost unnecessarily cautious. He cast a simple Anti-muggle charm nonverbally, making sure neither Moriarty nor Mycroft saw him using it, though for the latter case, it was probably a useless precaution.

Immediately, Moriarty's glance kept sliding off from side to side, like he couldn't keep it forward. It worked.

"He's not one of us," Sirius said.

"How can you tell?"

"I put… something that makes anyone who doesn't have my power unable to see me from his side of the glass."

Mycroft studied Moriarty intently.

"Yes, I see he is unable to focus his eyes on you, despite the fact he knows where you are. Interesting."

Mycroft made a curt gesture. A man came from a side-door, roughly

pulled Moriarty to his feet and led him away.

"Is that it?" asked Sirius after Moriarty left.

"Naturally not," Mycroft replied, "This way, now."

Sirius was then led to another room, entirely white, undecorated and unfurnished except for the florescent lights above, a couple of iron-wrought chairs set on the either side of a white plastic-top table. Mycroft and Sirius took a seat there and regarded each other for a brief moment.

"If you know of Moriarty, then you know what he used to force Sherlock to take his own life," Mycroft began.

"Some key that can unlock anything," said Sirius. "Broke into the Pentonville Prison, Bank of England and stole the crown jewels in the Buckingham Palace at the same time to prove he had it."

"But."

"The key was a lie. There was no key."

"I see you are adequately informed. Good." Mycroft planted both forearms on the table and leaned forward. "Have you noticed anything strange about that case?"

"Rigging an entire jury sounded unrealistic to me," Sirius replied. "I mean, some stubborn, righteous person should've raised a fuss, yeah?"

"You will be surprised how easy it is to make the average person capitulate to the crowd, but as it happens, yes, you are quite correct. Also, how could Moriarty convince so many key persons- many whom which were experts in the field of Computer Security- a universal key code can exist when it cannot?"

Sirius shrugged.

"I've heard detailed arguments that explained, very adequately and convincingly, the chances a computer code that breaks all security is vanishingly small," Mycroft continued. "Normally that is enough for

me to discard the idea as false. However, *I continue to affirm the idea that a universal key code that opens all doors can be real.* "

" *So* ?" Sirius groused. "A lot of people hold onto ideas they know are likely false."

"An unreasonable adherence to an idea might find home to some, but not to *me*," said Mycroft severely. "I take pride in keeping my brain in an orderly manner. Holding onto false ideas are not merely a waste of *space* -it is cause for *disorder* . Nor is the phenomenon isolated. It is *pervasive* -but only limited to the persons who had the power to influence the outcome of that case, even those whom such stubbornness is entirely out of character."

"Okay, fine, let's say I buy it," Sirius growled. "What do you want me to do about it?"

"First, remove the *thing* that has *infected* this idea in my mind," said Mycroft grimly, "Do that and I will dispose the video footage that recorded your indiscretion."

Sirius considered saying no just to annoy him. But then he decided why not, Confunding Muggles were illegal anyway.

Sirius did a quick *Finite Incantatum* on Mycroft under the table.

"Happy now? Can I go home?"

Mycroft blinked a few times.

"Yes, much better," he said at length, "And no, not yet."

Sirius slouched moodily in his seat. Mycroft curled his lips at him again.

"How is working for my little brother? Hellish, I imagine?"

"It's fun, though I do fantasize turning him into a toad sometimes."

Mycroft's smile now displayed teeth. "That's good, that's good, isn't it? A pity it must end soon."

Sirius frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Sherlock is about to become a father to an *infant*," said Mycroft pointedly. "A baby changes *everything*, especially when you are in the business of fighting crime."

"Obviously. So?"

"You know my brother is preparing for a partial retirement. Reluctantly and often resentfully, but he is. In all likelihood, if or when he returns working at full volume, he will take a far less visible role so as to protect the little one from enemy reprisals. This means more *delegation* for him and more *specialization* for his agents. This would leave you, his general utility man, rather lean on exciting work."

Sirius said nothing.

"I'm by no means asking you to join my line of work, even on a freelance basis," said Mycroft. "At this point in time, you would be more of a liability than an asset. Now I don't say this to belittle your abilities, which is rather considerable, according to my observations. I particularly admire your ability to quickly make home in your new surroundings. But unless there is a war that threatens the existence of your society, your involvement in my line of work would be rather awkward, wouldn't it?"

"Would break way too many laws," Sirius grunted.

"I thought as much," said Mycroft. "Nor am I about to ask you to do something that would lie heavily on your conscious. No. All I ask is that you regularly sweep my person and stop *enchantments* from taking hold of my mind."

Sirius was surprised. "That's it?"

"Yes, that is all."

"For *now*, you mean," snorted Sirius. "Why do I have a feeling this is going to be the start of a downward spiral?"

"You are too wise to take my word woodenly," said Mycroft,

smirking. "Good. I like a man who *thinks* . Thank you, Mr. Black. I promise you will be more than adequately rewarded."

"I don't need your money," Sirius sneered. "And since when did I agree to this?"

"You might find the compensation comforting when the feeling of tedium settles in," drawled Mycroft, brushing aside Sirius's protest. "Now you won't tell any of this to John, will you? I'd rather not cause distress to someone having a high-risk pregnancy."

"Yeah, sure, whatever," snorted Sirius. "Are you done? Great! I'm off!"

And with that, Sirius Disapparated.

"What took you so long?" John asked when Sirius appeared directly in 221B's living room.

"Mycroft wanted a word," said Sirius. He sniffed the air and noted the flat smelled like a Thai restaurant. Everyone got their food, then. Good. John's mood had a tendency to take a very war-like slant when deprived of sleep or the food cravings weren't satisfied within an hour. And today John had been more snappy and irritable than usual because Hamish/Malcolm/Benedict/Jeremy/Edward was restless and kept kicking at his mummy's spine and bladder.

Sherlock scowled. "What did he want?"

"Wanted to know if he caught a wizard," said Sirius carelessly. "No such luck."

"How did you do find out?" asked John. "Asked him questions? Made him pronounce Latin? Put your wand in his hand and see if it explodes?"

"I rather like my wand, thanks. I just cast an Anti-Muggle charm that made him unable to see me."

"Oh, that's works. What else?"

"Mycroft wanted me to remove the Confundus charm on him and asked if I could do it on a regular basis."

"He had a *Confundus* charm on him?" John exclaimed, half-rising from the sofa where she was attempting to rest on. "How did he know he had a Confundus charm? What was it doing?"

Sirius shrugged. "I'm not sure what he had to be honest. He kept going on about him not being able to get rid of an obviously false idea. ' *Since my brain would never hold onto an idea I know to be false, therefore someone put an enchantment on me*,' or something like that. How does that work?"

"Hell if I know. I stopped asking the How of the Holmeses," John grumbled, sinking back into the sofa. "Maybe a false idea he knows is false triggers fragmentation alerts."

" *Ugh*, you and your computer metaphors," Sirius complained. "It's like you're speaking a foreign language!"

"Oi, not my fault you wizards decided to segregate from us!"

"Not my fault I was born and raised there either," Sirius shot back, grinning. "Can I go play with my godson now?"

John waved him off, but Sherlock stopped him.

"What was the false idea the charm put into Mycroft's head?" Sherlock demanded, grabbing his arm.

"Can't this wait? I want to play with Harry!" Sirius whined.

Sherlock's grip was relentless. " *What was it?* " he hissed.

Sirius sighed and Apparated to 221C, taking Sherlock with him.

"I wasn't trying to hide it from you, okay?" said Sirius at the irate Sherlock. "I just didn't want to upset John-looked plenty upset just *mentioning* your brother had a Confundus Charm on him. The idea he couldn't get rid of was ' *A universal key code that opens all doors can be real* .'"

Sherlock stopped abruptly, just as Sirius expected.

After a long of brooding silence, Sherlock opened his mouth again.

" 'can be'," he repeated.

"I know you want precise data. Yes, it was ' *can be* '."

Sherlock went quiet again.

"… *Elegant*," he muttered. "You can see Moriarty's genius in the *subtly* : not *is*, but *can be* . A strong affirmative statement using 'is' may create strong rejection, but 'can be' gives the victim room to fill in the gaps themselves, rationalizing the idea in way that is adequate to him."

Sirius nodded.

"Also, since the charm was still in effect, the person who cast the charm on Mycroft is still alive and at large. A charm of this sort continues to be in effect until someone removes it or the caster dies, correct?"

"Yeah."

"And the man Mycroft showed you was *Moriarty* ."

"Uh-huh."

"Incarcerated?"

"Looked it."

Sherlock smiled brutally.

"Good. Thank you. Now do take the job Mycroft offered, we can't let him lose his edge, you can imagine what it would do to the *taxes* ."

Sirius grinned back. "Sure, whatever you say, your highness."

Sherlock returned to the first floor. John was no longer at the couch

as previously. In fact John was absent from the living room entirely. Sherlock checked the kitchen and then headed to the bedroom.

The door was locked. Sherlock took out a penknife capable of unlocking any mechanical lock (enchanted, of course), and unlocked the door.

He expertly dodged the smelly, balled-up sock that came sailing towards his face the moment he opened it.

"Most people," John snapped from the bed, "would get the hint when they encounter a *locked door* ."

"You've been irritable since this morning," Sherlock observed.

"I'll be as irritable as I want!" snarled John. "You try to be nice when you can't find a comfortable position…"

"Perhaps it would help if you didn't focus so much on positions."

John threw another balled-up sock at him. Sherlock caught it and put it on the bookshelf, where a lot of throwable ammunition was kept. John looked at them longingly as Sherlock sat on the bed.

"I *hate* being pregnant," John grumbled. "I'm never doing this again. Your DNA is not allowed anywhere near me."

"Yes, that would wise," Sherlock agreed as he massaged John's back.

"Just five more weeks and I'm done," John growled, glaring at the bump. "If you're not on time, I'm giving you an eviction notice. It'll be induction for you!"

"I heard overdue infants have health risks," said Sherlock agreeably.

" *Shut up*," John hissed. "Don't give him ideas."

Sherlock and John went quiet for a moment.

"A bit of macabre humour for you," said Sherlock, handing over his phone.

John took it. On the screen was a short text exchange:

Did you got rid of him? SH

He outlived his uses. The serum you gave me worked marvelously, but I still needed to verify if he was one of them.

Couldn't overlook possibility he deluded himself into thinking he is one of them, I suppose. SH

One can never be too cautious.

Fine. Now just because he agreed to check your brain, does not mean you can pawn him off to others to check theirs. SH

Must you always be so spiteful?

John put a look of grim satisfaction after finished reading.

"So he's finally dead. Moriarty."

"Yes, finally."

"… Good."

Harry came downstairs in the early morning hours of his birthday feeling both anticipatory and cautious. He peered into the living room from the kitchen to gauge the mood of the adults, John's in particular. Until Benedict/Jeremy was conceived, Harry thought pregnancy only involved weight gain and expansions to the front. Now he had a deeper appreciation of the amount of stress, structural remodelling, changing of initial layout and outright compromise of base structure women had to go through to have a baby. In his opinion, mothers ought to be lauded for life for even going through the 40-42 weeks of it.

John and Sherlock appeared to be in an extremely good mood, but in a way that said something ominous happened to a vicious criminal (possibly a syndicate of them). Harry, upon reflection, decided he didn't want to know.

"Here's the birthday boy," John said cheerfully.

"Happy Birthday," Sherlock rumbled, a smile crinkling the corner of his eyes.

Harry decided it must have been an *exceptionally* vicious criminal who'd fallen into an evil fate as he joined Lupin and Sirius at the table. Sirius ruffled his hair, beaming, and Lupin wished him a very Happy Birthday.

Harry took a moment to admire the breakfast spread. He knew Mrs. Hudson didn't prepare it because the food was non-traditional: French toast sprinkled with powdered sugar, savoury mushroom crepes covered in white sauce, croissants, tiny omelette rolls that had spinach tucked inside (tamagoyaki, if he remembered correctly), bagels, smoked salmon, American-style blueberry muffins and Greek yogurt.

Harry helped himself to some French toast whilst eyeing the crepes.

"We really shouldn't keep imposing on you and Mrs. Hudson," said Lupin apologetically.

"I keep saying the same thing about Mrs. Hudson," said John. "Then I wake up and breakfast is already there."

"She doesn't mind," said Sherlock, still looking pleased in a way that bode ill to someone else.

Sirius, who was practically vibrating in his seat, whipped out an envelope.

"Look what I got for you," he said in a sing-song voice.

Harry opened the envelope and let out loud whoop. Tickets! Three tickets to the Quidditch World Cup Final, Ireland verses Bulgaria! He was going to the Quidditch World Cup!

"Wow, Sirius, this is great!" Harry said happily.

"How'd you get those?" asked Lupin, admiring the tickets.

"I have connections," said Sirius mysteriously.

"Your connection doesn't happen to have the name 'Lestrade' does he?" asked John dryly as she held up three more tickets, tied in a bow.

Sirius turned a bit pink and Harry whooped again.

"Maybe. Say, Harry, do you have any friends you want to invite?" Sirius asked hastily.

"Well, Ron said his dad usually gets tickets through his work and Julia told me her whole family's going, so they're already set," said Harry. "Neville, though, I don't think his grandmother wants to buy tickets. So definitely Neville. Hermione, too."

"You should invite Ron just in case Arthur can't get hold of them this time," said Lupin, smiling. "It's a once-in-a-life-time opportunity, and he shouldn't miss it. Britain hasn't hosted the cup for forty-five years!"

Then everyone except Sherlock started talking spiritedly about the World Cup.

"It's got to be Ireland," said Sirius through a mouthful of blueberry muffin. "They flattened Peru in the semifinals."

"Bulgaria has got Viktor Krum, though," said Harry.

"Krum's one decent player, Ireland has got seven," said Sirius shortly. "I wish England had got through. That was embarrassing, that was."

"What happened?" asked John.

"Went down to Transylvania, three hundred and ninety to ten," said Sirius gloomily. "Shocking performance. And Wales lost to Uganda, and Scotland was slaughtered by Luxembourg."

"If you lot are going to talk about amateur sports, go fly a broom or something," said Sherlock, waving a hand in dismissal in a good-natured sort of way as he read the paper.

Singularly vicious, Harry thought, correcting his assessment of the unnamed/unknown criminal for a third time, while everyone ignored Sherlock and kept talking about Quidditch.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and tucked into his food.

Lestrade surveyed the large group of Ministry of Magic workers before him. To a person they were wearing crisp business suits of either black or midnight blue, and their shoes were appropriate for their suits. The wizards were wearing sedate ties and the witches had their hair up in conservative updos and were free of animated or living ornaments. Had they all worn dark sunglasses, the group would've looked like extras for the MIB. As they were, they could've blended into the streets of Central London and none would've been wiser.

Lestrade took a deep breath. After harping and grousing at the Magical Law Enforcement for their inadequate Muggle attire knowledge for months, he thought they'd finally got it. He certainly hadn't had to do major corrections as late, and to his tiny regret, there hadn't been any new entries to his private gallery of shame.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Lestrade started solemnly. "You've gone a long way. Gone are the days you've thought wearing a kilt over a poncho is acceptable and felt there is nothing wrong when a wizard traverses Muggle London wearing a flowery nightdress as long as he's wearing trousers underneath. I'm very proud of you."

The Ministry of Magic workers whispered amongst themselves, smiling and nodding.

"Having said that," said Lestrade, putting a stop to the whispering, "I'm disappointed that you have not yet grasped the subtleties of *situational awareness* . As you wouldn't wear dress robes and expensive jewellry when venturing to Knockturn Alley incognito, you wouldn't dress formal when going to a remote countryside arranging a festival that is meant to be casual and silly. As you are right now, you would look like a bunch of secret government agents out doing shady business."

People started looking down as Lestrade's words sink in. Then a loud murmur aroused. A few hissed: *'See! I told you this wasn't right!'* while others protested, *'but we really* are *secret government agents… !'*

While they muttered, Lestrade took out his phone and took a picture of the lot.

"Aw, c'mon, guv!" protested a wizard after the shutter sound effect.

"Cripes, I *knew* I'd end up in the gallery of fail again!" complained a witch who looked very familiar.

A few more people lodged similar protests. The others merely shook their heads or palmed their faces in shame over their collective failure.

"That is all," said Lestrade, tucking his phone away. "Now go change."

The ministry wizards and witches trooped back to the clothing racks, grumbling. Once Lestrade was certain they were reaching for casual outdoor wear, he took his leave.

Lestrade stopped by Baker Street. Not for a case, but to pick up his wife, who was there for Small Group. He levitated Ellen a scant inch above the floor and brought her downstairs by magic, saving her the trouble of waddling down the stairs.

"This is the *best*," said Ellen blissfully as she floated to the ground floor. "I love being pregnant."

Lestrade swelled with husbandly pride. "So what did you guys talk about?"

"Well, John and Sherlock are still fighting a lot," Ellen replied as she got into the car. "They make up quickly, though, and Sherlock is getting more used to the idea of having a baby in flat, we think: He finished moving his chemistry rig and set up a co-sleeper."

Lestrade laughed hard at the ensuing mental images. "Great."

"Speaking of, when are you going to learn to transfigure stuff? John said they only had to get the co-sleeper and car seat 'cause the two wizards living downstairs are transfiguring everything else for them."

Lestrade looked to the side. "Dunno. It's, uh, a lot tougher to do than charms."

"Well, hurry up, 'cause magic toys are a lot cooler and they're 100% germ-free. Sherlock tested it."

"Anything else?" Lestrade asked loudly.

"Oh! Oh! Jacqueline is officially *dating* someone!"

Lestrade, a father of six, did NOT almost ram into the car in front them.

"… *Shut up!* " he nevertheless howled.

"Yea-huh! It's, like, *Facebook* official. She, like, actually changed her status to 'In a Relationship'!"

This time Lestrade, father of six, did NOT brake abruptly, thus causing the vehicle behind him to honk long and loud.

"Blimey, this *is* serious. So who's the lucky guy?"

"She said he's a doctor who works at a tiny little hospital called Johns Hopkins. His name is Robert."

Lestrade recalled the only doctor who worked at Johns Hopkins Hospital whose name was Robert that he knew of. He immediately discarded the idea. Nah, it couldn't be him. How could the two have even *met* ? Even if they had, Jacqueline would've been her relentlessly formal self, and she too smart to let something like Dr. Robert D Ju happened to her.

"He's *soooo* good for her," Ellen went on dreamily. "Seriously, she's like in a state of glowing-ness. I've never seen her look so… so *alive* . She even showed us a picture of them two together. They looked *soooo* cute."

"Sounds like a keeper. What did John say?" Lestrade asked just in case; because no way John wouldn't find it awkward that her ex was dating one her closest girlfriends.

" 'So what are we supposed to call you two? Jackbert?' " Ellen thought it over. "You know, Jackbert sounds weird. What about Rojack?"

Greg smiled as Ellen came up with different ways of meshing up the names 'Robert' and 'Jacqueline' into one. It was something that sprung up between the small group ladies when he and Ellen started dating. At one point Ellen referred to their relationship as 'Grellen' and since then, Joanna and Steve were called 'Stevanna', Amy and Dennis was christened 'Aennis', Rebecca (Becky) and Boaz were 'Borebs'…

Lestrade commanded himself to not ask. Seriously, don't ask, don't ask, *don't ask*…

"What do you call Sherlock and John?"… *Blast!*

"J-Lock," said Ellen, simply. "We used to call them Johnlock, but it didn't sound right, so we switched it to J-lock."

Lestrade felt weak. "… Right."

"I got it, *Rocq* ! We should call them *Rocq* !" said Ellen excitedly, now back to the subject of christening Jacqueline's first ever relationship. "It's *perfect* ."

"Sounds French."

"What *ever*," Ellen said, playfully slapping his shoulder. Then she sighed and made the familiar motions of rubbing her pregnant belly.

"… He's not moving," she said pensively, studying her sizeable bump.

"What do you mean? How long has this been going on?" Lestrade asked, feeling a bit uneasy. Babies were plenty active at 37 weeks.

"Since this Sunday," said Ellen, running a hand over her stomach.

"He usually goes, like, *boom, boom, boom, boom* when I press like this, but he only went like *eh, eh, eh* a few times before quieting down." She said so while miming rigorous punching motions for the 'booms' and feeble knocking for the 'ehs' one-handed.

"Did you ask John about it?"

"She said, *'Ellen, I'm a doctor in emergency medicine, not obstetrics and gynecology* '," said Ellen, passably imitating John's dry tone and voice. "She said drink some Cola and lie down. The sugar should make him excited."

"Have you?"

"Uh-huh. But he only moved a little bit." Ellen paused. "I think I'm gonna call the midwife."

"Okay."

Harry had a long, satisfying day of fun for his birthday. After unwrapping all his presents, he spent the morning roaming around London with Julia trying to do freerunning (and failing miserably). Then the two of them went to the Burrow and played Quidditch with Ron and his siblings (Neville and Hermione was there, too, but they preferred to keep their feet on the ground). After consuming Mrs. Weasleys' excellent cooking for lunch, he zoomed around Hebrides on his broomstick with his godfather while his most favourite teacher, Remus Lupin, watched. The three of them returned to Baker Street just around sunset for another grand feast, featuring foods from restaurants Harry *knew* didn't cater or do takeaway and the most superb birthday cake that had three layers. He felt himself nodding after eating five to six helpings of everything, and then went out like a light as Lupin started to serve hot chocolate.

Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he had a very strange dream.

He was in a darkened room. An enormous snake was on the hearth rug. A small man named Peter, nicknamed Wormtail, was talking to

someone sitting in a high-backed armchair in the room. From the chair came a cold, high voice… the voice of Lord Voldemort. No one noticed Harry was there and it was hard to make anything out because everything was fuzzy and distant. It was as though he was watching a show from a broken-down television from ten feet away- or he was a partially anchored invisible ghost. But he was certain Voldemort was talking about killing someone… *him!*

Then he saw an old man-a man he'd never seen before. He limped on a cane and was eavesdropping on Wormtail and the person on the chair. The old man got caught. Wormtail turned the chair around so the old man could see who sat there. The old man started screaming in horror. Then there was a flash of green light, and the old man fell to the ground.

Harry woke up with a start as he was about to see who sat on the chair. The old scar on his forehead, which was shaped like a bolt of lightning, burned painfully as though someone had cut the flesh again with a thin blade.

For a while Harry lay flat on his back, breathing hard as though he had been running. He noted he was lying on the couch as he stared at the ceiling.

"You okay?" asked John from the sitting room table.

"Nightmare," grunted Harry as he ran his fingers over the scar.

John walked over to the couch, sat on the coffee table, and placed a palm over Harry's scar. Slowly, the stinging sensation drained out as John's hand warmed his entire forehead.

"Doesn't look like you have a fever," John remarked, "But your head hurts?"

"Just the scar," said Harry.

John frowned at that. "The last time just your scar hurt was when LV was close by, back when you were first year."

"But Voldemort couldn't be *here*, right now," Harry protested. "That's absurd… *impossible*…"

"Well if he is, he's being very quiet about it," said John. "Let me ask Mycroft if spied any spectral, evil-looking half humans lurking around 221B."

John actually took out her phone and started typing up a text. Harry wondered how John was wording the question. All *he* could think was: *Hi Mycroft, sorry to bother you, but Harry said his scar hurts and the last time it happened an evil dark wizard called Voldemort was close by. Can you check the CCTV around the flat just in case? Thanks.* Even inside his head the words sounded stupid.

In the middle of typing, John's phone pinged.

"Oh, who is it," John grumbled half-heartedly.

The expression on John's face transformed into that of shock after reading the new text.

For one stupid second, Harry thought Mycroft pre-emptively replied: yes, he *had* spied a spectral, evil-looking half human lurking around 221B.

Then John whispered, "Oh, G-d, *Ellen*…"

"What happened?" asked Harry, alarmed.

"Ellen just went through an emergency C-section," said John, hurriedly getting up. "She's okay, but the baby is in the NICU. 80% blood loss. Could mean severe brain damage. Getting a transfusion now."

Harry's heart stopped.

Final Notes : I had a long note full of funny stuff, but then this happened. Poor Lestrade. Poor baby. Just know there is a purpose to all this… anyway… uh, happy New Year, dear readers (BOC shuffles out).

For Life

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). **Late term miscarriage scare in this chapter.** Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Six: For Life

Lestrade and Ellen checked into the hospital within an hour after Small Group per the advice of their midwife, after they told her the Cola trick didn't make Isaac move. Martin, Rupert and Elise were left at Jackie's as usual, but Julia opted to come along. Ellen was taken to the examination room after a fifteen minute wait, an unheard of occurrence. The nurse on duty did the usual checkups and called for another attempt to excite Isaac with a sugary drink. The general air was that of treating a false alarm. It all looked so ordinary-routine.

Everything started to change when the nurse started frowning. She called in reinforcements and a doctor.

The doctor came, and after feeling around for ten minutes, she declared Isaac needed to come out *now* . Something wasn't right.

Lestrade hadn't seen a C-section before. But he was used to seeing and even touching human blood and guts, being a police officer in Serious Crimes, so he stayed for emotional support. Ellen needed it; she didn't say anything, but wouldn't let go of his hand.

No experience in Serious Crimes prepared him for what was to

come. It was an entirely different game to witness your own wife with an incision and her guts lying on the table. The sight almost undid him.

The doctor took out Isaac. He was as white and limp as damp papier-mâché. He didn't cry.

In fact he looked dead.

Lestrade barely registered the questions directed at him after Isaac was transported to the NICU. The doctor in charge mentioned severe blood loss, possible organ failure due to shock, and brain damage from the lack of oxygen. Cause of blood-loss was still unknown. Did Ellen have any incidents of physical trauma? Even the slightest bump could've caused the haemorrhage.

Then the doctor said Isaac will have to go through an immediate blood transfusion. That snapped Lestrade into high alert.

"You *can't*," Lestrade stuttered. "I have a… rare blood type. It's genetic. I got a blood transfusion as a tot, and though I didn't kill me, it caused all sorts of problems."

"What is the name of the blood group type?" asked the doctor.

Lestrade frantically tried to remember what Robert told him last year.

"… Magus; it got registered at the ISBT five years ago."

Lestrade soon found himself sitting on the floor because he couldn't prop himself up anymore. Someone had grimly reported Isaac's body didn't react well to the first transfusion attempt and they were rushing to find a unit of O and Magus positive blood.

The clock was ticking and they were losing him fast.

As he stared at the floor, heart in his mouth, Lestrade desperately willed the staff to hurry up, please hurry up, please save Isaac, *let Isaac live* .

He also prayed the same, many times.

The silence that echoed after his desperate prayers was frightening.

Isaac's second and third transfusions went through without any problems. But the transfusions depleted the entire supply of O and Magus positive blood in London. The hospital wanted at least six pedi units in reserve, just in case Isaac needed it later, which wasn't unlikely.

Lestrade didn't know who spread the word-Julia perhaps?- but he was *this* close to grabbing a nurse by the cuff and demanding that they just take all his blood, never mind procedure, when John arrived at the scene with all of his in-laws, Arthur and Molly Weasley, Sirius Black, and Albus Dumbledore.

"They're all positive for the Magus blood group," John announced, somehow looking awe-inspiring despite the ever-present cardigan and pregnant bump.

"How are they all here so quickly?" protested someone inconveniently sharp. "The antigen was discovered in *America* and all known occurrences of Magus positive persons are from there! How did you know about this? What's going on?"

Lestrade spied Dumbledore waving his wand under his summer coat.

"Here is the documentation," said John, brandishing a blank sheet of paper.

"… Everything seems to be in order," said the sharp someone from earlier, his eyes out of focus.

"You just need to verify everyone's ABO type and process their blood as usual," said John calmly. "You don't have to take my word or records by faith."

Mr. Someone nodded. "Yes, of course."

Only Arthur and Molly were O positive and eligible for donation.

"Do you have any children over the age of eighteen?" asked the phlebotomist who was rubbing iodine on Arthur's left arm. "We want to have as much blood in reserve as possible."

"Yes, Bill, Charlie and Percy," said Arthur, who was staring at the proceedings with terrified fascination. "Bill and Charlie are overseas, but Percy, he still lives with us."

Molly called Percy over the MMN right after this, just before she got her blood drawn.

"Can't this wait, Mother?" said Percy sanctimoniously. "I'm terribly busy at the moment. I'm working on a report for a new regulation on cauldron bottoms. There have been an increase number of incidents of leakage lately…"

Lestrade wanted to scream. His son's life was on the line, and the prat had the gall the talk about *reports* ? *Cauldron-bottom* reports?

"PERCY IGNATIUS WEASLEY, YOU WILL COME HERE THIS VERY INSTANT!" Molly roared, making everyone jump. "A BABY'S LIFE IS ON THE LINE AND HE NEEDS YOU!"

"… Alright," said Percy, looking quite alarmed. Then he turned to someone they couldn't see and said: "Excuse me, Mr. Crouch, but I need to leave for a moment. I'll return as soon as I see what the fuss is about…"

"If your son doesn't show up in five minutes, I won't be responsible for my actions," muttered Lestrade after the call ended.

"I understand," sighed Arthur. He picked nervously at the plaster covering the fresh puncture on his arm. "Now don't you worry; he'll be here in a moment…"

Lestrade wanted to believe him.

Percy Weasley arrived in three minutes, thus saving Lestrade the trouble of killing him.

"Are you sure this is *safe* ?" asked Percy after answering a volley of questions he didn't understand, but secretly advised on how to answer. He looked as though he was about to face torture as the nurse looked for a suitable vein. "Father, are you *absolutely* sure?"

"Yes, it's perfectly safe. Muggles do it all the time," said Arthur. Then he stretched out his arm. "I just went through it myself, and see: nothing went wrong! You'll be fine!"

"Why wasn't the baby delivered at St. Mungo's?" Percy demanded, turning pasty white when the nurse brought out the needle. "He would've been healed immediately with a blood-replenishing potion!"

"Mrs. Lestrade is a *Muggle*, Percy," said Arthur wearily after modifying the nurse's memory. "Besides, the baby lost too much blood; he doesn't have the strength to eat on his own…"

Arthur was forced to use the stunning spell on his own son because Percy lost it when it came time to actually insert the needle. He just couldn't stomach the idea of a hollowed needle going into his arm while he was still conscious. Lestrade told himself it was no good to call the person who could save your child a coward as he watched the nurse mechanically draw blood from a stunned Percy. The vacant look on the nurse frightened him to the core. He also wondered if they'd get enough blood from a magically stunned person as Arthur squeezed Percy's hand for him.

"Good job, Percy," said Arthur brightly after the nurse was done. "You've done very well. Thanks to you, Isaac has a sporting chance of living!"

"… I should hope so," said Percy with a would-be dignified voice. "That was very… *uncomfortable* . I've never been more thankful for wizard healing. Well. I better go, now, Father, I told Mr. Crouch I'd return as soon as I can…"

"Don't move too quickly," Lestrade muttered as he watched the nurses transport the blood pack for processing. "You just gave away a pint of blood. You'll black out if you do. No showers for the next 24 hours. Eat well and drink lots of water."

"Yes, Mr. Lestrange," said Percy pompously as he got unsteadily to his feet.

"It's *Lestrade*," Lestrade growled.

Percy was abashed. "Sorry, sir," he apologised quickly.

"No, sorry, that was uncalled for," said Lestrade wearily. "Thanks. This… means a lot to me."

He went to visit Ellen after talking to the doctor in charge. She looked pale in her pastel blue nightgown that had teddy bear patterns. Lestrade practically collapsed on top of Ellen, and they held each other tightly.

For a while they just sat there, feeling exhausted to the marrow.

"They finished giving Isaac his third blood transfusion," Lestrade reported at length. "He responded well. They're going to put him on cooling therapy soon."

"What's cooling therapy?"

"They'll put him on a chilled blanket to lower his body temperature. They're basically putting him in a state of hypothermia to shut down his body so it won't take away the blood his brain needs, and his brain is the highest priority right now. They're going to keep it up for the next 72 hours."

" *Oh* ."

They sat for another long moment.

"Even if he survives, he might not be okay," said Lestrade brokenly. "All the delays to get him the right blood… plus that failed first attempt… he might have severe brain damage. The doctor said he might develop cerebral palsy, cognitive impairment, or hearing and vision loss later. Ellen, can we do this?"

It was their worst fear, having a disabled child. Ellen had worked for an adult home for the severely mentally retarded once, and she barely lasted a year there. For the residents of the home, self-

awareness was an unknown quality. Lestrade had seen less severe cases plenty of times, and what had struck him the most was how even eating normally was a luxury for these people.

Could they raise a son like that? A son who would have to depend on caregivers for the rest of his life?

Would he end up like those low-lifes who abused their mentally disabled children because they couldn't cope?

"We need to pray," said Ellen. "Only God can help him now. We've done everything we humanly can. Now it's up to Him. I know God can heal him."

Then she started to choke up.

"And even if… God says no… and he… doesn't make it… I know he'll be okay and so will we."

"I don't have the kind of faith you have, Ellen," Lestrade mumbled.

"That's okay," said Ellen shakily. "It's not about how strong your faith is. It's about how trustworthy is the thing you put your faith *on* ."

Ellen and Lestrade were clear to visit Isaac a couple of hours later.

"We've connected him to a ventilator because his lungs aren't working 100%. Otherwise he's doing pretty well and his body responded well to the latter blood transfusions. You'll be able to take him home once he's finished with cooling therapy and he starts breathing on his own," said their doctor.

"So he's in the clear? Is his brain going to be okay?" asked Ellen.

The doctor didn't reply.

The NICU was only a few halls away from the patient rooms where the new mothers stayed at. Yet the trek was among the longest Lestrade ever took. He dragged every step as he both dreaded and longed for the sight of his son.

They had to stop just beyond the door that separated the NICU from the rest of the hospital. All visitors had to wash their hands because the infants inside were fragile, susceptible to infection. Lestrade scrubbed his hands clean.

It was eerily quiet inside the NICU proper. Lestrade caught a glimpse of a baby no bigger than one of his palms. It looked like a clay doll. He wondered how big Isaac was and felt distressed when he couldn't remember.

Ellen suddenly stopped and grabbed his arm. Lestrade followed her line of sight.

There was Isaac, lying inside an Isolette. He was hooked up to too many machines and shivering on top of a blue mat. He was naked except for his nappy, and his entire body was the shade of purplish-red bare hands took when outside the cold for too long. His eyes were sealed shut and both of his tiny clenched fists were resting next to his face.

Lestrade blinked back the tears that sprung up.

You're alive, he thought. *Thank God, you're alive. Please be well. Please,* please *be well…*

Quite a few visitors came once the news got out. His mates at the station came bearing balloons, sweets and caffeine drinks. Ellen couldn't eat any of the solid edibles until much later because she hadn't passed gas yet, and the hunger and pain killers made her very cranky. Donovan visited too, and so had many of his old SOCOs, including Anderson. Jason and Jeremy stopped by, the former bearing food and the latter several changes of clothes. Jackie and the not-pregnant Small Group ladies were there all day, every day, pretty much, relieving Lestrade of his hovering duties whenever he wanted to go see Isaac (which was all the time) when they weren't praying for Isaac's full recovery.

His father-in-law visited every evening. He didn't talk much, if at all, but Lestrade was certain he was doing some kind of subtle magic

whenever he stood over the sleeping Isaac; he always had a deep look of concentration on his face, and his jacket rustled as though a wind was blowing, but there wasn't any wind. Mr. Shin also tossed out the healer from St. Mungo's Hospital of Magical Maladies and Injuries Jeremy brought in to look over Isaac after the healer made a comment that implied it might be a kindness to let Isaac go considering he may not have the magic that would've prevented this from happening in the first place.

Magic children didn't haemorrhage inside the womb, according to the healer.

Superintendent Chambers came to visit two days after Isaac's birth. Lestrade was shocked because he thought Chambers regarded him as a grunt with a funny last name and a dubious work record. He later cynically wondered if there was some political motive behind the visit. Ellen chided him for not giving his Super the benefit of the doubt. After all, Chambers was a father too.

Then Sherlock came to visit by himself.

"Where's John?" asked Lestrade stupidly, acutely aware there were several days' worth of growth on his face.

"Baker Street," grunted Sherlock. "I told John to stay."

Lestrade wondered about the shouting match the fiat must have triggered.

"And John let you?"

"We didn't argue," said Sherlock, almost defensively. "Now are you going to let me see your son or not?"

Sherlock stared at Isaac like a tall, gaunt, granite statue. His face was expressionless, but something about his stillness suggested he was in state of deep turmoil.

Was he imagining Benedict in same state as Isaac? Was he wondering what he would do if something like this happened to Benedict? Was he considering the possibility Benedict may not even *survive* if the same thing happened to him?

Lestrade received no answers. Sherlock left abruptly without saying a word.

"Sorry about him," John sighed when Ellen and Lestrade told what happened over the phone. "I rather hoped… G-d, I married a winner, didn't I?"

"We don't mind," said Ellen. "You know, you should stop being so mean to him."

"I'm *mean* to him?" said John blankly. "Um, do you read the blog…?"

"You compliment him as a detective and as Harry's dad, but you put him down whenever you talk about him as a *husband*," said Ellen flatly. "Why do you do that when they're the same person?"

John was silent for a long spell.

"… I do that, don't I?" said John.

"Yeah you do," said Ellen without a trace of malice.

John let out a tiny sigh.

"What a winner I am," said John ruefully. "Thanks, Ellen."

Then quietly she hung up the phone.

Lestrade returned to the flat after Isaac was off cooling therapy, but still on the medical ventilator. There he checked himself in the mirror for the first time in four days.

An old man looked back at him. His hair appeared to have gone from mostly grey to almost completely white.

He wondered what happened as he idly pinched a few stands between his fingers.

"Daddy you look *old* !" Martin declared when he went to Jackie's to pick up his other children, whom he had neglected horribly.

"Beard!" shouted Rupert, pointing at it.

"Yes, beard, and I look old because I *am* old," said Lestrade. He looked around. "Where's your sister?"

"Older or younger?" Martin asked.

Lestrade sighed. "Both."

"Elise in bed," said Rupert, "Julie with Hawwy."

Lestrade blinked. " *What* ?"

As though summoned, Julia and Harry entered the living room. Julia was holding Elise, who was squirming energetically, and Harry had a stuffed

bear in the one hand, a robot doll in the other, something green and slimy was dripping off his wireframe glasses and his hair looked as through something blew up in his face at close range.

"Hi Dad," said Julia, sounding terrifyingly calm and mature. "I told Auntie Jack and grandpa to take a break. Then I called Harry for help because I couldn't take care of Elise and Martin and Rupert all at the same time."

"I was useless," Harry muttered.

Lestrade wasn't sure if he wanted to shoot Harry or thank him from the bottom of his heart.

"So how is Isaac?" asked Julia.

"He opened his eyes," said Lestrade. "I took a picture. Look-"

He took out his phone and flipped through the photo album for the correct photo (he'd taken many).

Julia's breath hitched when she saw Isaac's chubby face. He had a head full of dark hair, rosy-red cheeks and his nostrils still sported the ventilator tube. Both of Isaac's tiny fists were next to his face in a boxer pose, and he was staring straight at the camera through his

dark, penetrating eyes.

"… When is he coming home?" Julia whispered.

"We don't know yet," said Lestrade, "Soon, hopefully."

Julia nodded as she studied her newest brother with damp eyes.

Isaac was able to breathe on his own 24 hours after he finished cooling therapy. He was the same weight as the day he was born: exactly half a stone. Lestrade didn't care about that. All he cared about was *now he could hold him.*

Isaac was by no means the smallest newborn of his children, but he felt the most fragile. Lestrade held him gingerly against his chest, his right hand curling protectively over the back of Isaac's head, and savoured the minute tickling sensation of Isaac breathing. Then he laughed when Isaac slowly made his way down to one side, mouthing.

"Hungry, yeah?" he said, feeling the tear slid down. "You better go to mummy."

Ellen wept openly as she held Isaac.

"Oh, praise God, *praise God*," she whispered, facing the ceiling and clutching Isaac. Then she looked down, her eyes overflowing with tears, and kissed Isaac's head. "Hi baby."

There was a lot of crying when the Small Group reconvened early that day to celebrate.

"Your child is seriously God-blessed," Becky declared, drawing a large circle with her hand and then pointing for emphasis. "If Ellen didn't have the foresight to talk to her midwife… if Greg didn't know he had a rare blood type… if Julia wasn't there to contact everyone… if John didn't know all those people who had the same rare blood type as Greg… I mean, Isaac only made it because *everything* worked so perfectly together. If this isn't a miracle, I don't know *what* is!"

"It was so God-full," Ellen said fervently. "We came at the perfect time. The doctor said… if we'd come *earlier*, they may not have noticed something was wrong and sent us back home and he would've *died* ."

She paused for a moment to collect her composure and brush away the fresh onslaught of tears.

"I knew he was going to be okay," said Ellen more calmly. "Even when the doctor said he might have brain damage, even when no one could tell me if he was going to be okay, I knew he was going to be fine. I mean, even if he died, I knew it was going to be okay because God is taking care of everything, but I just *knew* he was going to okay one way or another."

All of the Weasleys came to visit the day Isaac came home, including Arthur and Molly's two eldest, Bill and Charlie.

"Thought you two lived overseas," said Lestrade after shaking their hands.

"We came back home for the World Cup finals," said Bill. "I wish I came earlier. I would've donated blood, too."

"Me too, and I wouldn't have passed out," said Charlie, grinning.

Lestrade was able to take a good look at the entire clan while everyone oohed and aahed over Isaac. There were seven kids in total, six boys and a girl (Lestrade felt a ridiculous sense of competitiveness against Arthur for one-upping on him). Three of the boys were built like Arthur, who was tall and lanky, and the other three boys (which included a pair of identical twins) took after their mother, who was short and stocky. Everyone had freckles and red hair, though Arthur's temples were grey and there were streaks of silver in Molly's hair.

Lestrade was about to pass over Arthur and Molly's grey hairs until he noticed Percy-the tall one with short hair wearing horn-rimmed glasses-had several white hairs peeking through the bright ginger.

"Did your hair turned grey after giving blood?" Lestrade asked in a low voice.

"Well, I only notice the greys about two days afterwards," said Arthur, rubbing his neck. "I didn't think much about it because I was expecting it to happen sooner or later. But Molly started to worry when Percy sprouted white hairs, too, so we all took a trip to St. Mungo's. We lucked out. Remember Robert Dongyi Ju? He started working at St. Mungo's since this week. He checked us and gave us a clean bill of health."

"What did he say about the white hairs?"

"Mmm, something about a person gives away a bit of their life when they give someone else their blood," said Arthur, frowning in concentration. "I didn't quite understand what he meant by that, but… apparently when a witch or a wizard donates blood, they often manifest white hairs, which is their magic's way of representing the life that was drained out."

Lestrade rain a hand through his almost entirely white hair.

"Makes intuitive sense, I suppose."

The sea of visitors was now taking turns holding Isaac. As though apologising for the fuss he raised over his birth, he remained remarkably calm as he was passed from one person to the next.

"C'mon, Percy, you should hold him at least once!" said one of the twins, after handing Isaac back to Lestrade.

Percy looked deeply reluctant as Lestrade approached.

"He's not a bomb, you know," said Lestrade. "Just the boy you saved. Thank you so much, by the way."

Percy hesitantly reached out as he said stiffly: "You're welcome."

"He'll be as comfortable as you are," said Lestrade, passing the baby over. "Just make sure you're supporting his neck."

"Yes, sir," said Percy, taking Isaac in manner that suggested he was

handling volatile and explosive material.

Everyone sniggered as Percy just stood there, stiff and awkward, with Isaac snuffling against his chest.

"Ooooh, you're a natural, Percy," cooed Molly. "Look how comfortable he is."

"He likes the man-hands," said Ellen as she took a picture.

Percy flew into panic when Isaac started to whimper and squirm.

"Why is he doing this? I didn't do anything wrong!" he exclaimed.

"He's just tired," said Ellen kindly, taking Isaac back. "He had a long day."

"Having a new baby would make going to the Quidditch World Cup very difficult, wouldn't it?" said Molly.

"Yeah, I was expecting him to pop out three weeks later," said Lestrade. "It's going to be many sleepless nights and dirty nappies from now on. I need to stay."

"You can go," said Ellen, patting Isaac's back.

"Nah, I want to say at home," said Lestrade firmly. "Arthur, you can have my ticket, if you want it."

"I'm well set," said Arthur, smiling. "What about Julia and the others? I can take them with my brood, if you like."

"My brothers-in-law are taking them, but thanks for offering. You met them before, yeah?"

Right on cue, Jeremy and Jason made their presence known. Bill and Charlie recognised them immediately.

"The Shin brothers," Charlie breathed, "Never thought I'd see you two here."

Jason wiggled his fingers and Jeremy beamed in an overtly friendly

way.

"Quidditch star and our old Head Boy; charmed," drawled Jeremy.

"I heard your old house lost its winning streak for the last three years. The quality of Slytherins must've gone further downhill since you left," said Charlie beaming in a cheeky but good-natured way.

"One could argue Gryffindor's current winning streak is only propped up by a certain famous someone, and not because of any improved quality of its members," Jeremy shot back. "If *I* led Slytherin, we would've had a different story."

"But you're not in Hogwarts anymore," said Bill. "And how can you be so sure?"

"Winning against your old house is *easy*," said Jeremy haughtily. "Your lot is all will and passion, but no winning strategy."

" *Jeremy*," said Jason, frowning, as the twins, Ron and Ginny rose up in anger.

"I'm just saying," said Jeremy, shrugging his shoulders artfully before putting on a deeply contrite face. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have brought up old rivalries. Even if I was still a student, I wouldn't have begrudged Gryffindor's win at all-you've worked hard for it."

Those words mollified the Weasley children, but Jason continued to regard his brother with a stern and forbidding expression. Lestrade never realised this before, but Jason looked alarmingly like his father when he was serious.

At any rate, Lestrade had enough of the unexpected demonstration of Gryffindor-Slytherin rivalry.

"Sorry, but visiting hours are over," said Lestrade. "I'm really sorry, but Isaac needs his bottle and nap."

"I'm sorry you can't go," said Arthur as his family prepared to depart. "Perhaps I could record it? I know how to use a redeo vicorder now…"

"Nah, I'm good," said Lestrade. "My sister-in-law is working on something. I have no idea what she's doing, but she mentioned something about a magical alternative to video streaming."

Ron and Jeremy perked up when he said that.

"She found a way to stream the game *live* ?" asked Ron.

"I guess?" said Lestrade. "She said give her another week, and I'll be able to watch it like I was there."

A shrewd, calculating look flashed across Jeremy's face.

"What are you up to?" asked Lestrade suspiciously.

"Just had an idea," said Jeremy, smiling in a disarming way. "Don't worry. I'm not plotting to take over the world. Ron and I take care of the business side of Jackie's enterprise, and bless her, she rarely realises how profitable her inventions can be. MMN, case in point."

Lestrade couldn't argue against that. "And the streaming spell she's working on is the other example? How? Wizards don't have telly."

"We don't *need* it," said Jeremy patiently. "Just you wait."

Jeremy left after bidding everyone farewell and promising to send an Owl to Ron later. Jason followed him.

"So you work with him, huh?" said Bill to his youngest brother. "How is he like?"

"He's decent," said Ron, scratching his head. "I didn't know he used to be in Slytherin. But it makes sense. He has that cunning thing."

"He is that," Bill agreed. "When he and Jason were still at Hogwarts, none of the other Houses could win the Cup because of them. Those two showed me what it really means to be *cunning.* They actually sat down and analyzed where you can gain the most house points, and then they organised the entire house of Slytherin into a point-earning machine. Jeremy coached all the younger students to target the teachers that gave the most points, and made sure they answered all the 'point-awarding' questions at class and at the clubs

those teachers led. That automatically stopped any house from earning too many points."

"Jason led the Quidditch team," said Charlie. "His tactics were *insane*, but it worked. If you didn't stop him, he'd score three times before you can take a breath. If you *did* try to stop him, he tricked you into fouling, and he'd still score. Then he'd take a penalty shot and score again. It was *crazy* ."

Later, after all the guests left, Lestrade and Ellen talked about Hogwarts as they watched Isaac sleep.

"I don't like the house rivalry," said Ellen. "Why can't they just put everyone in one big dorm?"

"It's probably traditional," said Lestrade.

Ellen hummed thoughtfully as she rubbed Isaac's tummy.

"Where do you think Martin, Rupert and Elise would get sorted into to?"

"Well Rupert loves imitating Julia, so he'll probably want to go to Hufflepuff. Julia said she talked the Sorting Hat into putting her anywhere *but* Slytherin because she didn't want to be in the same house as the Malfoy brat. He might do that."

"I can see Rupert in Hufflepuff," said Ellen. "Martin is pretty analytical, so maybe Ravenclaw. Elise loves dive-bombing straight into anything, so maybe Gryffindor."

"Where do you think *you'd* be sorted to?" asked Lestrade, smiling.

"I wouldn't be able to go there. I don't have magic."

"But if you *did*…"

Ellen shrugged. "I don't know. Anywhere is fine. What about you? Where do you think you would be sorted in?"

"No clue."

"I think Hufflepuff," said Ellen seriously. "You and Julia are exactly alike."

"Julia takes after her mum," Lestrade protested.

"Maybe her looks, and maybe her smartness, but her personality is all *you* . That's why I love her."

Final Notes : Isaac's story is based on what actually happened to one my closest friends (written with permission). I followed the timeline of events almost exactly and replicated what was spoken as accurately as possible (minus the magic-related bits, obviously). The baby Isaac is based on is currently a healthy and happy seven month old. Though on the small side (being a three weeks premature), baby E is hitting the developmental milestones with flying colours. I still have all text messages that told me what had happened and what was going on. It still seems very unreal whenever I read them.

I've donated blood in the past, though not recently because I don't make the weight requirements. The International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) actually exists. I figured in a world that has magic, the possibly responsible chromosome would be discovered sooner or later, if only by accident. There are 30 human blood type systems recognised by the ISBT, including the well-known ABO and Rh systems. Most of them are named after the patient the antigen was first discovered. The fictional Magus system would be the 31st.

None of the blood donation related drama would've happened in real life. There are very strict guidelines to blood transfusion. Nothing is taken by faith and most medical practices don't do whole blood transfusions anymore (thanks Dream's Abyss for reminding me!). In short, BOC made stuff up for dramatic value. And to torture Percy for the giggles. I am a horrible person.

Multitudes of Mayhem

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Seven: Multitudes of Mayhem

About a week after Isaac Lestrade survived his birth, and the day before the Quidditch World Cup finals, Ron and his parents travelled to Baker Street to pick up his best friend Harry. To save time, they used Floo-powder instead of the car. His mum and dad went first, saying " *Baker Street!* " as they stepped into the fire. Ron followed suit.

Ron thought something must've gone wrong when he stopped spinning, because he tumbled into a brightly-lit, sparsely furnished basement flat that was definitely not 221B. But his mum and dad were there as well, and a black-haired, pale-eyed man wearing a white T-shirt and black jeans held out a hand to pull Ron to his feet like he was expecting him.

"Where am I? And who are you?" Ron asked as he straightened up.

"221C Baker Street," replied the man. "And the name's Black; Sirius Black."

Recognition dawned on Ron as soon as he heard the name. Sirius Black looked very different from Ron's memory of him. When he'd seen him inside the Shrieking Shack several months ago, Sirius's

face had been gaunt and sunken, surrounded by a quantity of long, black, matted hair. The hair was short and clean now, Sirius's face was fuller, and he looked younger and a great deal more handsome.

"So you really live downstairs," said Ron, looking around. The flat was decidedly Muggle; none of the black-and-white photographs or posters moved, the mirrors only reflected and all the lights ran on eclecktricity (they were either white tubes or transparent bulbs that had wires inside). The only hint of magic was the tall glass jar that contained glittering powder on the mantelpiece.

"You've done a fine job making your flat look like a Muggle one," Dad said, peering around admiring the décor. "What is it like, living here?"

"I'm never bored," said Sirius, shrugging.

"What have you been doing?" asked Mum.

"Helping Sherlock, mostly," Sirius replied. "Just recently he locked me in a quarantined room at a Muggle Hospital and made me conjure baby toys. He wanted to see if conjured items had germs."

"What are germs?" Ron asked.

"Microscopic life forms that can cause diseases; they're too small for the naked eye to see, but Muggles have special instruments that let you see them. Anyway, that was the least interesting thing I've done so far and it was far from boring."

Sirius then led them upstairs, hands in his pockets. He entered first floor flat without knocking.

The familiar sight of 221B greeted them. Harry was sitting in the leather armchair by the fireplace, reading a novel, and John was lying sideways on the leather couch.

"The Weasleys are here, M'lady," said Sirius, bowing deeply. "Where is his Highness Holmes?"

"His Lordship is out bothering Lestrade," John replied, peering at the door over the couch's armrest. "Hello, Arthur, Molly and Ron. Good

to see you."

"Hello, John. No, stay put, stay put," said Mum, bustling eagerly over to the couch and smiling. "And hello, Harry, dear. Have you got your trunk ready?"

"It's upstairs," said Harry, grinning back as he set his novel on a side table.

Everyone gathered around the couch where John was at. The bags under John's eyes were more pronounced, both feet looked very swollen and John's stomach was so big it looked as though one of Hagrid's Halloween pumpkins was growing in there.

"So when are you due?" asked Mum, touching John's stomach adoringly.

"Estimated delivery date is September 3nd," said John. "But he'll probably be late. First ones usually are."

"Have you decided his name?"

"Yes. Jeremy Benedict Holmes- Jeremy after Sherlock's favourite great-uncle; Benedict after no one in particular. It might change, though. Sherlock wants to add either Edward or Littlejohn in memory of great-uncle Jeremy's best friend Dr. Edward Littlejohn. I've vetoed Littlejohn because no kid deserves that. Sherlock doesn't understand why; he deleted Robin Hood."

"Jeremy Edward Benedict Holmes, that's quite a mouthful," said Dad fondly.

"Not as bad as Jeremy Oswald Necropolis Æthelbert Holmes or Mycroft Ian Rathbone Tantamount Holmes." Then John suddenly froze. "… Ohmygosh, I think I know how the Holmeses name their children."

"How do they?"

"Sherlock's middles names," said John, looking perturbed, "Are *Ignatius* and *Gregory* ."

There was a disturbed silence as everyone lined up all the first letters of Sherlock's full name.

"… Right, the plague ends here," said John at length. "No funny initials for my kids."

Dad and Sirius left to retrieve Harry's trunk shortly after this. Ron and Harry stayed behind, and listened to Mum and John talk about Jeremy Benedict (after calling the yet-born baby 'Benedict' for so long, it was hard to call him just Jeremy).

"I'm kind of hoping he'll come out early, preferably before term starts," said John. "If I give birth in September, Harry won't get to see JB in person until he's three months old."

"Yes, that would be rather sad," agreed Mum. "And considering what going to happen in Hogwarts this year… perhaps you can ask Professor Dumbledore if Harry can visit during the weekends. Bill did when I had Ginny."

"What's happening in Hogwarts this year?" asked Harry.

"You'll find out at the start-of-term feast, I expect," said Mum, smiling. "It's going to be very exciting- mind you, I'm very glad they've changed the rules, it almost nearly didn't-"

"What rules?" asked Ron and Harry together.

"I'm sure Professor Dumbledore will tell you… oh, there you are, Arthur."

Dad and Sirius finished settling Harry's wheeled trunk on the floor next to the fireplace.

"I'll meet you tomorrow at the campsite with Remus," said Sirius, squeezing Harry's shoulder, as Dad pointed his wand at 221B's fireplace and lit a fire there. "Save us a good spot."

"Yeah, see you," said Harry, giving Sirius wide grin and a side-hug.

"You first, Harry," said Dad, stepping away from the fireplace, which was now roaring with high, emerald green flames. "Take hold of

your trunk."

Harry nodded. He swooped down and gave John a quick hug, and then he walked over to his trunk, grabbed the handle and stood in front of the flames.

"Bye, John! And Benedict, don't come out when I'm not there!" he shouted.

Then he walked right into the fire, saying " *the Burrow!* " and vanished.

"Did he eat it?" asked Fred excitedly as soon as Ron made it back home.

Ron shook his head. "Sherlock wasn't there. What is this, anyway?"

He held up a big, fat toffee in a brightly coloured wrapper. Fred and George had given it to Ron with instructions to feed it to Sherlock before he left for Baker Street, as their mum (wisely) didn't allow them to join.

"A Ton-Tongue Toffee," said Fred, looking disappointed. "George and I invented them, and we've been looking for someone to test them on all summer. I guess you couldn't have given it to John."

"If I did, you'd have to dig me up later, because Harry would've killed me. Anyway, what is it supposed to do?"

"Remember the name, dung-brains: it's a *Ton* -Tongue Toffee. It's supposed to make your tongue grow a *ton* ."

Everyone in the kitchen laughed. Then, before any of them could say anything else, there were two faint popping noises, and Mum and Dad appeared out of thin air at George's shoulder. Fred quickly took the toffee in Ron's hand and stuffed it inside his trouser pocket.

Unfortunately, Mum didn't miss the action.

"What did you just put inside your pocket, Fred?" said Mum sharply,

her eyes narrow with suspicion.

"Just a sweet, Mum," said Fred in a jaunty, winning sort of voice.

"What kind of sweet?" Mum pressed. "If it's got anything to do with the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes-"

"Now, now, Molly," mumbled Dad. "I'm sure it isn't-I mean you've already cleaned out their room of anything suspicious…"

Just then two girls appeared in the kitchen doorway. One, with very bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth, was Ron and Harry's friend, Hermione Granger. The other, who was small and red-haired, was Ron's younger sister, Ginny. Both of them smiled at Harry, who grinned back, which made Ginny go scarlet-she had been very taken with Harry ever since their first visit to 221B.

"Turn out your pockets," Mum ordered, marching over to Fred and George, " *both* of you."

"Aw, c'mon, Mum," said Fred, edging away from her with a reproachful look on his face.

"Why don't you show Harry where he's sleeping, Ron?" said Hermione from the doorway.

"He knows where he's sleeping," said Ron, "in my room, he slept there last-"

"We can all go," said Hermione pointedly.

"Oh," said Ron, cottoning on. "Right."

"Yeah, we'll come too," said George.

" *You stay where you are!* " snarled Mum.

Ron and Harry edged out of the kitchen, and they, Hermione, and Ginny set off along the narrow hallway and up the rickety staircase that zigzagged through the house to the upper stories.

"What are Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes?" Harry asked as they

climbed.

Ron and Ginny both laughed, although Hermione didn't.

"Mum found this stack of order forms when she was cleaning Fred and George's room," said Ron quietly. "Great long price lists for stuff they've invented. Joke stuff, you know: Fake wands and trick sweets, loads of stuff. It was brilliant; I never knew they'd been inventing all that…"

"We've been hearing explosions out of their room for ages, but we never thought they were actually *making* things," said Ginny. "We thought they just liked the noise."

"Only, most of the stuff-well, all of it, really- was a bit dangerous," said Ron.

"And you were going to feed Sherlock something that might be dangerous," said Harry, raising an eyebrow.

"I didn't *know* it was dangerous!" Ron protested. "Anyway, they were planning to sell their stuff at Hogwarts to make some money, and Mum went mad at them. Told them they weren't allowed to make any more of it, and burned all the order forms… She's furious at them anyway. They didn't get as many O.W.L.s as she expected."

"And then there was this big row," Ginny said, "because Mum wants them to go into the Ministry of Magic like Dad, and they told her all they want to do is open a joke shop."

Harry snorted.

" *Joke shop*, huh? Well that definitely suits them better than a government desk job. And I'm sure Sherlock would've eaten the toffee even if you told him it was dangerous - for *Science*, if nothing else."

They started off upstairs again. As Harry, Hermione, and Ginny followed Ron up three more flights of stairs, shouts from the kitchen below echoed up to them. It sounded as though Mum had found out the true nature of the toffee inside Fred's pocket. Ron shrugged as he opened his bedroom door.

"Fred and George are in here with us, because Bill and Charlie are in their room," Ron told Harry as he edged his way between two of the four beds that had been squeezed into his room. "Percy gets to keep his room all to himself because he's got to *work* ."

"Is Percy enjoying work?" asked Harry as he sat down on one of the beds.

" *Enjoying* it?" said Ron darkly. "I don't reckon he'd come home if Dad didn't make him. He's obsessed. Don't mention anything about Abroad while you're here unless you want the pants bored off you, and *don't* get him onto the subject of his boss. *According to Mr. Crouch… as I was saying to Mr. Crouch… Mr. Crouch is of the opinion… Mr. Crouch was telling me…* They'll be announcing their engagement any day now."

"Have you had a good summer, Harry?" said Hermione. "Did you get to spend time with Sirius?"

"Yeah, lots," said Harry. "He's doing better every day. I don't think he's ready to face the Wizarding World, though. Whenever Mr. Lestrade invites him for drinks at the Leaky Cauldron, he always says no, sorry, no. Going to the Quidditch World Cup is a big step for him."

"What about Lupin? Is he-" Ron began, but the look from Hermione reminded him there was a full moon last night and so he fell silent. He also remembered that there had been two full moons since the summer holidays started, and Lupin wouldn't have had access to the Wolfsbane potion.

"As well as you can expect," said Harry sadly. "We don't know anyone who's up to making the only Potion that helps and is willing to brew it, so… well… it's *hard* ."

There was a pause.

"How is Isaac doing?" said Ginny, to cover the awkward moment.

"He's fine," said Harry. "Mr. and Mrs. Lestrade are just waiting for his brain test results. They think there's nothing wrong with him, but

they want be absolutely sure. Now what about you three? How are your summers so far?"

"I've been working with Mr. Jeremy all summer," said Ron immediately. "The MMN is going *international*, mate!"

"How?" asked Harry.

"It started like this: A lot of people want to watch the World Cup, but not everyone can go," said Ron. " *We* couldn't have afforded to, if Dad couldn't get tickets from work. Then there are people like John, who can't because they're Muggle, and Mr. Lestrade, who just had a baby. When I found out Miss Jackie was making something that would let Mr. Lestrade watch the game like Muggle film, I figured a lot people would want to use it too."

" *Brilliant*," said Harry admiringly. "So Miss Jackie made something that lets her *broadcast* the game, and you saw its business potential- the perfect collaboration."

"Isn't it?" said Ron, beaming. "Anyway, I convinced Miss Jackie we should let all MMN users have access to it, too, for a small fee. Mr. Jeremy negotiated a deal with the Ministry. They granted us early access to the entire stadium in exchange for three percent of the profits. We've also set up an MMN stand at the campsite to sell the phones to foreign witches and wizards. The revenue we made from the project is *phenomenal* . I reckon it's going to triple by the time the Quidditch World Cup finals starts!"

"Ron's been as bad as Percy when it comes to the MMN," Ginny whispered loudly to Hermione.

"Shut up," growled Ron. "I'm not *obsessed* . Anyway, Miss Jackie would sack me on the spot if I started working as much as Percy…"

"Well, I have a feeling this is going to change the world," said Harry seriously. "I reckon the *Daily Prophet* will want to run an article on you soon: The Magical Mobile Network's Business Director."

Ron felt himself go pink. Harry could say the most embarrassing things sometimes. But… *Business Director*, he *really* liked the sound

of that…

"I think they've stopped arguing," said Hermione, who had a wry smile on her face. "Shall we go down and help your mum with dinner?"

"Yeah, all right," said Ron. So the four of them left his room and went back downstairs to do just that.

They found his mum alone in the kitchen, looking extremely bad-tempered.

"We're eating out in the garden," she said when they came in. "There's just not room for eleven people in here. Could you take the plates outside, girls? Bill and Charlie are setting up the tables. Knives and forks, please, you two," she said to Ron and Harry, pointing her wand a little more vigorously than she had intended at a pile of potatoes in the sink, which shot out of their skins so fast that they ricocheted off the walls and ceiling and then fell on the floor. Then she jabbed her wand at the cutlery drawer, which shot open. Harry and Ron both jumped out of the way as several knives soared out of it, flew across the kitchen, and began chopping the potatoes, which had just been tipped back into the sink by an enchanted dustpan.

"C'mon," Ron said hurriedly to Harry, seizing a handful of cutlery from the open drawer, "let's go and help Bill and Charlie."

The first thing they met out in the garden was Hermione's bandy-legged ginger cat, Crookshanks, who came pelting out of the garden, bottle-brush tail held high in the air, chasing a gnome. The gnome's horny little feet pattered very fast as it sprinted across the yard and dived headlong into one of the Wellington boots that lay scattered around the door. Ron heard it giggling madly as Crookshanks inserted a paw into the boot, trying to reach it. Meanwhile, a very loud crashing noise was coming from the other side of the house. Once they entered the garden, they found Bill and Charlie, both with their wands out, and they were making two battered old tables fly high above the lawn, smashing into each other, each attempting to knock the other out of the air. Fred and George were cheering, Ginny was laughing, and Hermione was

hovering near the hedge, apparently torn between amusement and anxiety.

There was a clatter from overhead, and they all looked up to see Percy's head poking out of a window on the second floor.

"Will you keep it down?!" he bellowed.

"Sorry, Perce," said Bill, grinning. "How're the cauldron bottoms coming on?"

"Very badly," said Percy peevishly, and he slammed the window shut. Chuckling, Bill and Charlie directed the tables safely onto the grass, end to end, and then, with a flick of his wand, Bill repaired the tables and then threw tablecloths over them.

By seven o'clock, the two tables were groaning under dishes and dishes of Mum's excellent cooking, and Ron and his family, Harry, and Hermione were settling themselves down to eat beneath a clear, deep-blue sky. Fred, George, and Charlie immediately started talking about the World Cup. Mum argued with Bill about his fang earring, which Ginny approved of. Harry, who lived on Muggle takeaway when at Baker Street, listened rather than talked as he helped himself to chicken potpie, boiled potatoes, and salad.

At the far end of the table, Percy was telling Dad all about his report on cauldron bottoms.

"I've told Mr. Crouch that I'll have it ready by Tuesday," Percy was saying pompously. "That's a bit sooner than he expected it, but I like to keep on top of things. I think he'll be grateful I've done it in good time. I mean, its extremely busy in our department just now, what with all the arrangements for the World Cup. We're just not getting the support we need from the Department of Magical Games and Sports. Ludo Bagman-"

"I like Ludo," said Dad mildly. "He was the one who got us such good tickets for the Cup. I did him a bit of a favour: His brother, Otto, got into a spot of trouble-a lawnmower with unnatural powers-I smoothed the whole thing over."

"Oh Bagman's likable enough, of course," said Percy dismissively, "but how he ever got to be Head of Department… when I compare him to Mr. Crouch! I can't see Mr. Crouch losing a member of our department and not trying to find out what's happened to them. You realise Bertha Jorkins has been missing for over a month now? Went on a holiday to Albania and never came back?"

"Yes, I was asking Ludo about that," said Dad, frowning. "He says Bertha's gotten lost plenty of times before. Though must say, if it was someone in my department, I'd be worried…"

"Oh Bertha's hopeless, all right," said Percy. "I hear she's been shunted from department to department for years, much more trouble than she's worth… but all the same, Bagman ought to be trying to find her. But Bagman just keeps laughing and saying she probably misread the map and ended up in Australia instead of Albania."

Percy heaved a sigh and took a deep swig of elderflower wine.

"We've got quite enough on our plates at the Department of International Magical Cooperation without trying to find members of other departments too," he said. "As you know, we've got another big event to organize right after the World Cup. You know the one I'm talking about, Father." He cleared his throat significantly. "The top-secret one."

Ron rolled his eyes and muttered to Harry and Hermione, "He's been trying to get us to ask what that event is ever since he started work. Probably an exhibition of thick-bottomed cauldrons."

"And it's imperative that the event goes smoothly," Percy went on. "The entire Ministry's been under a lot of pressure and criticism since the Sirius Black case. I'm by no means saying it was a bad thing the truth about Peter Pettigrew came to light, but the case gave Mr. Crouch a lot of heartache and unnecessary difficulties. The way Shin June Hu handled Pettigrew's arrest really didn't help matters. If he followed proper procedure, none of this would've happened."

"Sirius Black's case was going to end badly for Crouch no matter

what," said Dad, frowning more deeply. "And I think Grandmaster Shin was giving Crouch an opportunity to salvage his reputation when he told him about Pettigrew. They used to work under the same department, you know, when You-Know-Who was active. I don't think they were friends, but they respected each other a great deal. Crouch relied on Shin when the he had to deal with Oriental wizards and Shin consulted Crouch when he needed an expert in languages."

"Yes, I heard about that," said Percy, positively writhing with excitement. "And no wonder- Mr. Crouch speaks over two hundred languages! Mermish and Gobbledegook and Troll…"

"Anyone can speak Troll," said Fred dismissively. "All you have to do is point and grunt."

Percy threw Fred an extremely nasty look, before continuing:

"All the same, Grandmaster Shin has every reason to feel remorseful. His falling out with Mr. Crouch is due to *his* mistake, after all. You have no idea how much his actions hurt Mr. Crouch-he won't even look at Shin in the eye!"

"Isn't it *Mr. Crouch* who's taking it too personally?" Hermione argued. "It's not like Mr. Shin was *trying* to hurt him. In fact he was he was trying to help him!"

"Yeah, if he's that upset, he could just slip some dragon dung in Mr. Shin's in-tray and get even, eh, Perce?" said Fred.

"That was a sample of fertilizer from Norway!" said Percy, going very red in the face. "It was nothing *personal* !"

"It was," Fred whispered to Harry. "We sent it."

The evening of the Quidditch World Cup finals, John and Sherlock went to the Lestrades' flat. When Lestrade let them in, he noticed John was bursting with excitement and Sherlock looked as though he was under extreme duress.

"Humouring the wife?" asked Lestrade.

Sherlock glowered at him fiercely. The sight warmed the blackened cockles of Lestrade's heart.

"I've wanted to see a Quidditch match for *years*," said John as she waddled over to the sofa to join Ellen and Isaac, who was snoozing on top of his mummy's chest. "Sherlock, stop sulking and get over here. Greg, how are we watching the game?"

Lestrade lifted up his new MMN phone, which a pure white owl delivered to him last night.

"Thus sayeth the note from Jacqueline Shin: just turn this on and it should be obvious."

Lestrade waited for Sherlock sit down on the sofa (next to John, naturally), and then pressed what he assumed was the home button.

A holographic image of a desktop about the size of a Tablet PC projected above the MMN phone. The only icon on the desktop had the label: *Quidditch World Cup Viewer* . Not knowing what else he was supposed to do, Lestrade poked a finger at the icon.

The holographic image changed to show a menu screen. The title on the top read: *Welcome to the Quidditch World Cup Viewer. Please select your viewing mode by tapping one of the options below.* Lestrade checked the options. There was basic mode ("see the view from the top-box!") costing two Galleons, high definition mode ("High quality images from multiple viewpoints, plus zoom-ins, slow-motions and subtitles!") costing four Galleons, and full immersion mode ("You'll feel like you're there!") costing ten Galleons. All the buttons next to the options were greyed out, and the green button on the button right hand corner said: 'Purchase'

"Of course it's not free," Lestrade muttered.

"What is this?" said Ellen, pointing the gold card that served as Jackie's note. It was now jumping and flashing the message: ' *Pick Me Up!* '

Lestrade picked up the card. Upon contact the card displayed a new

message: ' *put me over the phone!* ' Lestrade did so, and on the next blink all of the display options on the menu became available and the purchase button vanished. The card displayed the winking emoticon and wrote: ' *enjoy* !'

"Nice," said Lestrade, grinning.

"Let's try everything! Do the basic mode first!" said Ellen excitedly.

Lestrade poked a finger on the virtual button.

A second holographic image appeared above the menu one and expanded to fill the entire length and height of the living room. Once it stopped growing, they saw an HDTV-worthy footage of a crowd of magic-people talking, laughing, and roaming around buying souvenirs. Most were dressed like Muggles, but very inexpertly. John and Ellen giggled for over a minute when they spotted an old man wearing a flowery summer dress under a tweed suit with pink thigh-length galoshes. Salesmen were teleporting every few feet, carrying trays and pushing carts full of extraordinary merchandise. There were luminous rosettes- green for Ireland, red for Bulgaria- which were squealing the names of the players, pointed green hats bedecked with dancing shamrocks, Bulgarian scarves adorned with lions that really roared, flags from both countries that played their national anthems as they were waved; there were tiny models of fancy-looking broomsticks that really flew, and collectible figures of famous Quidditch players, which strolled across the palm of people's hands, preening themselves.

"How is this not High Definition Mode?" Lestrade wondered as he stared, mesmerized.

"Try the HD mode, then, and see what the difference is," said John.

Lestrade selected the option. The footage immediately turned 3D and the image quality became so clear it made reality look dull in comparison. The live footage first showed them the Irish supporters' campsite, all who seemed to have covered their tents with a thick growth of shamrocks so that it looked as though small, oddly shaped hillocks had sprouted out of the earth. The footage then showed them the Bulgarian supporters' campsite. The tents there weren't

bedecked with plant life, but each and every one of them had the same poster attached to it, a poster of a very surly face with heavy black eyebrows. The picture was, of course, moving, but all it did was blink and scowl.

Then two men abruptly appeared.

"Hellooooo, Magical Mobile Network!" cried Jeremy Shin, beaming hugely at the camera. "The Quidditch World Cup finals will commence in a few short minutes, and I'm sure everyone is as eager to watch the game as I am! I now have Mr. Ludo Bagman, head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, here to give us a brief word!"

Ludo Bagman was easily the most noticeable person they'd seen so far, including the old man walking around in a flowery summer dress and pink galoshes. He was wearing long robes in thick horizontal stripes of bright yellow and black. An enormous picture of a wasp was splashed across his chest. He had the look of a powerfully built man gone slightly to seed; the robes were stretched tightly across a large belly. His nose was squashed, but his round blue eyes, short blond hair, and rosy complexion made him look like a very overgrown schoolboy.

"Ahoy there!" Bagman said happily. He was bouncing as though he had springs attached to the balls of his feet and was plainly in a state of wild excitement. "What a day, eh? What a day! Could we have asked for more perfect weather? A cloudless night coming and hardly a hiccough in the arrangements… Not much for me to do!"

Behind him, a group of haggard-looking Ministry wizards rushed past, pointing at the distant evidence of some sort of a magical fire that was sending violet sparks twenty feet into the air.

"That's Gilbert Wimple," said Lestrade, pointing at the Ministry wizards. "He works for the Committee on Experimental Charms. He's had those horns for as long as I've known him. The bloke next to him is Arnie-Arnold Peasegood. He's an Obliviator-member of the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad. And that's Bode and Croaker. They're Unspeakables."

"They're *what*?" said Sherlock.

"From the Department of Mysteries," said Lestrade. "I had lunch with them once, when Grandpapa Shin took me to the Ministry canteen. They're very hush-hush. I have no idea what they do at the DOM…"

Meanwhile, Bagman was still talking.

"… Don't know when I've had more fun! It'll be sad to see it end… Still, it's not as though we haven't got anything to look forward to! For instance, at Hogwarts-"

"You're commenting this evening, aren't you Mr. Bagman?" said Jeremy, sounding like he was intercepting.

"Oh, yes! From the top-box, with both Ministers present-" Bagman was starting to say.

A deep, booming gong sounded somewhere beyond the woods, and at once, green and red lanterns blazed into life in the trees, lighting a path to the field.

"That would be the signal!" shouted Bagman, bouncing again.

"Indeed it is! Thank youuu, Mr. Bagman!" Jeremy turned to the camera. "We will now switch POVs to the stadium!"

And with that, the holograph changed sceneries to show a lantern-lit trail inside the wood. As the camera went down the path, they could hear the sounds of thousands of people moving around: shouts and laughter, and snatches of singing. The atmosphere of feverish excitement was highly infectious; Lestrade couldn't stop grinning.

The camera emerged from the wood, and a gigantic stadium made of gold walls came to view. As everyone stared, thunderstruck, the camera appeared to rise up to the air, covering the entire length of the wall. A floating subtitle/commentary box said the stadium seated a hundred thousand before disappearing.

Finally the camera stopped rising at some point high above the stadium, giving them a birds-eye view of the interior. They could see the stairwells carpeted in rich purple. Tiny dots of people were

climbing up those stairwells, and then moving to the left and right to take their places in the seats, which rose in levels around the long oval field. Everything was suffused with a mysterious golden light, which seemed to come from the stadium itself. The field looked smooth as velvet from their vantage point. At either end of the field stood three goal hoops, fifty feet high, according to the comment box; right opposite them was a gigantic blackboard very similar to the one Lestrade had seen in a magic bowling alley except it was larger. Gold writing kept dashing across it as though an invisible giant's hand were scrawling upon the blackboard and then wiping it off again.

The camera lowered itself inside a small, open-ceiling box, set at the highest point of the stadium and situated exactly halfway between the golden goal posts. About twenty purple-and-gilt chairs stood in two rows here, and the cameraman appeared to sit down on the middle chair. A second commentary/subtitle box appeared on the corner and said, ' *A display from the team mascots will precede the match.* '

"Let's try full immersion," said Lestrade, snatching the phone away from Sherlock, who was stabbing a finger at the options furiously to no avail.

Lestrade tapped the virtual button. Immediately the projected image started to expand even more. The sound of rushing wind echoed in his ears as he was fell into the image at frightening speeds. Lestrade let out a silent yell as the swirling tunnel of light and colours blinded him and then…

… He found himself sitting in a purple-and-gilt chair, his ears ringing with the roar of a crowd. He looked around, and realised to his shock that he was *in* the Quidditch World Cup stadium-right inside the top box, in fact. He looked down and saw the hundreds upon thousands of witches and wizards in the stands bellow. His skin felt the summer night heat, and when he touched it, he could feel the texture of the chair he was sitting on.

" *Blimey*," murmured Lestrade, overwhelmed. Then he looked around, calling out: "Are you guys here?"

No one answered. As he wondered about this, Lestrade noticed the other people inside the box. There was Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, and several foreign dignitaries. Next to Fudge was Malfoy Sr., his son and a woman who was likely his wife. Arthur and his seven children were seated at the opposite side of the box. Harry, Neville and Julia, Jason and Jeremy with Martin, Rupert and Elise, and Black and Lupin were with them. No one appeared to have noticed a middle-aged man in a white T-shirt and jeans had fallen into their mist.

Next moment, Ludo Bagman charged into the box.

"Everyone ready?" he said, his round face gleaming like a great, excited Edam. "Minister- ready to go?"

"Ready when you are, Ludo," said Fudge comfortably.

Ludo whipped out his wand, directed it at his own throat, and said " *Sonorus* !" and then spoke over the roar of sound that was now filling the packed stadium; his voice echoed over them, booming into every corner of the stands.

"Ladies and gentlemen… welcome! Welcome to the final of the two hundred and twenty-sixth Quidditch World Cup!"

The spectators screamed and clapped. Thousands of flags waved, adding their discordant national anthems to the racket. The huge blackboard opposite them was wiped clear of its last message (*Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans - A Risk With Every Mouthful!*) and now showed BULGARIA: 0, IRELAND: 0.

"And now, without further ado, allow me to introduce… the Bulgarian National Team Mascots!" Bagman bellowed.

The right-hand side of the stands, which was a solid block of scarlet, roared its approval.

"I wonder what they've brought," he heard Arthur saying. "Aaah!" Arthur suddenly whipped off his glasses and polished them hurriedly on his robes. " *Veela* !"

"Huh, what?" said Lestrade.

But a hundred veela were now gliding out onto the field, and Lestrade's question was answered for him. Veela were women… the most beautiful women he had ever seen… except that they *couldn't* be human. No human could make their skin shine moon-bright or their white-gold hair fan out behind them without wind… but then the music started, and Lestrade stopped worrying about them not being human- in fact, he stopped worrying about anything at all.

The veela had started to dance, and Lestrad's mind had gone completely and blissfully blank. All that mattered in the world was that he kept watching the veela, because if they stopped dancing, terrible things would happen.

And as the veela danced faster and faster, wild, half-formed thoughts started chasing through Lestrade's dazed mind. He wanted to do something very impressive, right now. He just couldn't think of what, though. There seemed to be some kind of discord between what he felt and what he wanted to do…

Then the music stopped. Angry yells were filling the stadium. The crowd didn't want the veela to go. Lestrade felt cold sweat beading on forehead as he realised what had happened to him.

He quickly brought the phone in his hand to his mouth and shouted: "Stop Immersion Mode!"

On the next second, he was back in his flat.

"That was *freaky*," Lestrade breathed, wiping his sweaty forehead.

"That was *awesome*," John disagreed, sharing a wide-eyed look with Sherlock. "I wonder how Jack managed it."

"You can ask her later. I'm switching back to HD right now."

Then Lestrade and did just that, much to Sherlock and John's disappointment.

The Irish national mascot turned out to be leprechauns. The thousands of tiny little creatures that looked like bearded men with red waistcoats, each carrying a minute lamp of gold or green, first circuited around the stadium like a green-and-gold comet before

dividing into two, one comet at each long end of the stadium. A rainbow arced suddenly between the two balls of light, before the balls forming a single, giant shamrock that showered the entire crowd with gold coins.

"Irish wizards don't seem to mind the stereotype," John remarked.

"Why the hell would they?" said Lestrade, looking jealously at the crowd, many of whom were still fighting and rummaging around under their chairs to retrieve the gold.

After the presentation came the introduction of players. Bagman introduced the Ireland team first. Quidditch was apparently a co-ed sport; three of the Irish players were women and the rest were men.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," Bagman screamed, "kindly welcome- the Bulgarian National Quidditch Team! I give you - Dimitrov!"

A scarlet-clad figure on a broomstick, moving so fast it was blurred, shot out onto the field from an entrance far below, to wild applause from the Bulgarian supporters.

"Ivanova!"

A second scarlet-robed player zoomed out.

"Zograf! Levski! Vulchanov! Volkov! Aaaaaaand- *Krum* !"

"Keep an eye on Victor Krum. He's some kind of Quidditch prodigy from what I've heard," said John, indicating Bulgarian Player in question.

Lestrade studied him. Krum looked a bit like an overgrown bird of prey with his dark and sallow skin, a large curved nose and thick black eyebrows. He was clearly internationally famous, though, because the whole crowd went wild when he flew out into the open.

"How hard is it, playing Quidditch?" asked Lestrade. "How do you play it, anyway?"

"The basic rules of Quidditch are pretty simple," said John. "Three

Chasers tries to throw a red ball through one of the hoops at the either end of the field and score ten points; a Keeper stays around the hoops and blocks incoming balls; Beaters use their bats to whack iron balls bewitched to hit anyone to disrupt opponent play; game ends when one of the Seekers catches the Golden Snitch. The team that catches the Snitch gains a hundred and fifty points."

"… How can you have a functional game with that kind of scoring system?" asked Lestrade incredulously. "If catching the Snitch awards you a hundred and fifty points, isn't it essentially a match between the two Seekers?"

"Not necessarily. Quidditch is always played in a series. It's the team that has the greatest number of total points that win." Then John pointed: "Whoa, just look at those Irish Chasers!"

Lestrade turned his attention to the game. Then he just stared. Though he knew a little better than nothing about Quidditch, he could see that the Irish Chasers were superb. They worked as a seamless team, their movements so well coordinated that they appeared to be reading one another's minds as they positioned themselves. The Bulgarian Chasers could barely keep the red ball in possession because their Irish counterparts were so fast. Commentary boxes appeared inside the holograph and explained all the moves. The camera crew, whoever they were, expertly zoomed-in, zoomed-out, provided separate slow-motion frames and even fancy circling shots whenever there was a pause in play to show just happened in greater detail.

About fifteen minutes of play, the one hundred thousand wizards gasped as the two Seekers, Krum and Lynch, plummeted through the centre of the Chasers so fast that it looked as though they had just jumped from airplanes without parachutes.

"One of them saw the Snitch!" John exclaimed.

"No, they *didn't*," said Sherlock, squinting. "It's a feint!"

As soon as he said so, Viktor Krum pulled out of the dive and spiralled off. Lynch, however, hit the ground with a dull thud that could be heard throughout the stadium. A huge groan rose from the

Irish seats.

"It's time-out!" yelled Bagman, "as trained mediwizards hurry onto the field to examine Aidan Lynch!"

A small frame appeared inside the holographic image. WRONSKI DEFENSIVE FEINT- DANGEROUS SEEKER DIVERSION read the shining purple lettering on the bottom of the frame, and the close-up footage showed Krum's face contorted with concentration as he pulled out of the dive just in time, while Lynch was flattened. Sherlock was correct: Krum hadn't seen the Snitch at all, he was just making Lynch copy him and was using the time while Lynch was revived to look for the Snitch without interference.

"Damn, he can fly," whistled Lestrade.

"And he's only eighteen or something," John marvelled.

Lynch got to his feet at last, to loud cheers from the green-clad supporters, mounted his broom, and kicked back off into the air. His revival seemed to give Ireland new heart. After fifteen more fast and furious minutes, Ireland was leading by one hundred and thirty points to ten.

And that was when things got *really* dirty: The requisite in-game rioting started-by the mascots. The leprechauns gave the veela the finger when the referee awarded Ireland two penalty shots after the Bulgarians questioned his call. The veela threw balls of fire at them in response as their faces elongated into sharp, cruel-beaked bird heads, and long, scaly wings burst from their shoulders. Ministry wizards entered the field to restore order, but had little success. One of the veela actually set the referee's broom on fire when he wasn't looking.

While chaos reigned in the field bellow, the match above continued at its furious pace. Beaters from either team were swinging their bats menacingly, apparently unconcerned if it was a ball or a human being they were hitting. Then the Irish Beater Quigley swung heavily at a passing Bludger, and hit it as hard as possible toward Krum. Krum didn't duck quickly enough. It hit him full in the face.

There was a deafening groan from the crowd; Krum's nose looked broken, there was blood everywhere.

"Time-out!" yelled Lestrade. "Oh, come on, he can't play like that, look at him-!"

" *Look at Lynch!* " screamed Ellen suddenly, jolting Isaac awake.

They looked. And soon realised the Irish Seeker had suddenly gone into a dive, and Lestrade was quite sure that this was no Wronski Feint.

"He's seen the Snitch!" Lestrade shouted. "He's seen it! Look at him go!"

Half the crowd seemed to have realised what was happening. The Irish supporters rose in another great wave of green, screaming Lynch on. But Krum was on his tail. How he could see where he was going, Lestrade had no idea. There were flecks of blood flying through the air behind him, but he was drawing level with Lynch as the pair of them hurtled toward the ground again-

-and for the second time, Lynch hit the field with tremendous force and was immediately stampeded by a horde of angry veela.

"The Snitch, where's the Snitch?" John demanded, who was practically leaping off the sofa whilst sporting fever-red patches on both cheeks.

"Krum got it- it's all over," said Sherlock, who was pulling John back.

Krum, his red robes shining with blood from his nose, rouse gently into the air, his fist held high, a glint of gold in his hand. The scoreboard was flashing "BULGARIA: 160, IRELAND: 170" to the crowd, who didn't seem to have realised what had happened.

"IRELAND WINS!" Bagman roared, who seemed to be taken aback by the sudden end of the match. "KRUM GETS THE SNITCH- BUT IRELAND WINS- good lord, I don't think any of us were expecting that!"

There was a short pause. Then slowly, as though a great jumbo jet

were revving up, the rumbling from the Ireland supporters grew louder and louder and erupted into screams of delight.

"I can see why wizards are crazy about this game," said Lestrade feverishly as he clapped.

"I wish I could play it," said John enviously before punching Lestrade's bicep with far less force than usual. "You're lucky; you can."

"Ummm, why do think it's a good idea for him play a sport that requires you to fly a hundred feet in the air without any safety nets when he gets into enough scrapes playing football?" asked Ellen, who was consoling a squirming and keening Isaac.

"I do prefer to keep my feet on the ground," Lestrade agreed.

"Your insistence to NOT realise all your opportunities is highly irritating," huffed Sherlock.

"Oh, shut up," Lestrade and Ellen retorted.

The camera was now focusing on Krum, who was surrounded by mediwizards that wanted to fix his broken nose. He looked very surly and refused to let anyone mop him up. His team members were around him, shaking their heads and looking dejected. A short way away, the Irish players were dancing gleefully in a shower of gold descending from their mascots.

"And as the Irish team performs a lap of honour, flanked by their mascots, the Quidditch World Cup itself is brought into the Top Box!" roared Bagman's voice.

"All the awards, Jack, all the awards," Lestrade murmured as he watched two panting wizards carry a vast golden cup into the top box and handed it to Cornelius Fudge (who looked very disgruntled), "Never thought I'd get to see something like this."

John raised a glass. "Hear, hear."

John and Sherlock returned to Baker Street after the game ended because Sherlock point-blank refused to linger for what he termed: *the tiresome social exercise of ruminating over collectively known facts ad nauseum*, i.e. post-game reliving. Normally John would've told him he can go back home by himself, but John had been making an effort to humour Sherlock's (often terrible) husbandly efforts since Ellen chided her for disregarding them. As Sherlock using the word 'tiresome' instead of 'hateful/boring/tedious/futile' hinted that he making such an effort, John followed along.

Later, John had to wonder if there was more to Sherlock's insistence to leave early than mere petulance and paranoia. She remembered getting into the cab, feeling a bit tired, and no memory whatsoever of afterwards. The next moment of consciousness was the morning after inside the bedroom.

"Did I pass out?" John asked aloud.

"Your powers of deduction are as spry as ever. Isn't it *patently* obvious?" said Sherlock's voice.

John ignored the tone. "Did you predict it?"

"A collapse was definitely within my calculations," said Sherlock imperiously. "You always disregard tremors on your leg as a ghost of your old psychosomatic limp. Though it is true for the most part, tremor plus an elevation in body temperature following strenuous physical/mental activity usually signals an imminent collapse."

"But I didn't feel feverish."

"The temperature elevation wasn't enough to warrant a trip to the A&E, but you were certainly heating up."

John sighed. "I better schedule an appointment with Noel, then, just in case."

"You have one in twenty minutes."

"Of course I do," John deadpanned. "Now help me up, I need to get dressed."

Sherlock left the bed immediately.

He returned a few seconds later with a pair of colourful socks, and started putting them on John's swollen feet with determination. It was kind of adorable in a way, John mused. Ever since the inevitable edema happened, John wore flip-flops all the time, much to Sherlock's annoyance. Apparently Sherlock regarded the footwear as evil because he never stopped complaining about them, and would secretly burn them in a fire. John was lucky they were cheap, because the cost of buying a new pair every other week was adding up.

"I don't have shoes that fit me comfortably," John said once Sherlock was done.

Sherlock waved a pair of trainers that looked a size bigger than John's other shoes.

"Crazy prepared aren't you?" said John; then went ahead and searched for clothes.

John and Sherlock left the flat in ten minutes. A black sedan was waiting for them at the curb. John eyed it suspiciously. Why was Mycroft trying to kidnap them right now? For some reason, Sherlock got in without complaint, so John got in too.

The car stopped at their obstetrician's office with two minutes to spare.

"I suppose this is Mycroft's idea of being thoughtful," John remarked. "Can you tell him he came off as creepy?"

To John's very great surprise, the driver saluted.

"Is there something going on?" John wondered.

While John submitted to Dr. Tulipan's examinations, Sherlock waited in the lounge. As it was often the case, he pored over his phone to pass time.

Except the phone Sherlock was poring over wasn't a regular mobile phone, but an enchanted one. The passerby and fellow visitors didn't realise this, and merely assumed he was texting on a black mobile phone like any other. They also assumed he was relaying news to friends and family. Again, they were not quite right. The text-exchange on Sherlock's mobile phone screen would've shown them this:

August XX, 20XX, 6:37 AM

Harry Watson

Am fine. Don't believe Daily Prophet headline.

Use MMN viewer to see what really happened.

Have just reviewed DP and MMN viewer.

The 'bodies' DP is referring to, are

they the victims Dr. Shin is rescuing?

SH

Harry Watson

Probably. he stopped the spell that was levitating camp manager & family.

perps disappeared as soon as someone shouted 'It's Grandmaster Shin!'

Disappeared = disapparated

Were they traced?

SH

Harry Watson

No. Mr. Weasley says can't track disapparated person. :(

I see.

Don't tell John. Had fourth collapse last night.

No need to exacerbate condition with upsetting news

SH

Harry Watson

OK

Harry returned to Baker Street as soon as he could when he heard the news about John. He didn't have to work to hide what happened at the World Cup, because John kept falling asleep abruptly, waking up hours later without a clue as to how long she'd been out. When it happened the third time, Harry laid his cheek on John's stomach and made a quiet plea.

"Benedict," he whispered. "Stop giving our mum such a hard time. I don't care if you're late. Just come out without any problems. If you do, I'll find a way to take you to Hogwarts, I promise."

As though he'd understood, Benedict made a series of taps from the inside.

The following day John stayed awake all morning, but as cautionary measure, remained in bed.

"I haven't had this problem since the Baskerville case," John remarked.

"This happened *before* ?" asked Harry in surprise.

"I started having this sleeping problem after returning from Afghanistan," John explained. "It's not narcolepsy. I'm alert during the day, but then one second I feel a bit tired and *boom* : I wake up hours later. It gave me a load grief-the Blind Banker case wouldn't have ended the way it did if I didn't pass clean out."

"… Are you telling me the Chinese mafia only managed to kidnap you because you were *asleep* ?"

"Yes," said John, looking a bit mortified. "Not my best moment."

Harry disagreed. From what he understood, John had knocked out several members of the Chinese mafia before spearing the murderous acrobat with the crossbow contraption that was set to kill her- all whilst tied to a chair.

"Anyway, I'm okay now," said John. "You can go back to Ron's."

"But -" Harry started to protest.

"Hovering doesn't help," Sherlock interrupted.

Harry shut his mouth. He knew Sherlock wasn't intentionally being hurtful, but he couldn't help but feel deeply hurt. Because it was *true* ; all he could do was hover, and hovering wouldn't help, not for this situation. This situation called for someone who had expertise in *Potions*, and Harry's potion making skills were mediocre at best. He didn't need a reminder that he was of no use when it *mattered* . Nor did he need to be reminded that his Potions Professor was out to get him, setting him up for failure at each class, and delighted in every wrong move he made. He already *knew* .

" *FINE* !" Harry roared. "I'll go back to the Burrow! Call Snape and ask *him* for help! You always do! I'm *useless* anyway!"

Then he stormed off, much to Sherlock's apparent astonishment.

Hermione was definitely feeling the end-of-summer gloom by the last week of August, which was unusual because she'd always looked forward to the new classes. Hermione had a feeling the people around her were affecting her own mood; they certainly weren't uplifting.

Harry returned to the Burrow two days after the World Cup fiasco. He tersely reported John recovered from her strange bout of illness and then stayed indoors for the remaining days of August, often sullen and uncommunicative. Fred and George had a similar story; they were frequently found sitting in a corner, quills out, talking in whispers, and their heads bent over a piece of parchment with an uncharacteristically serious looks on their faces. Mr. Weasley and Percy, on the other hand, weren't at home much. Both left the house each morning before the rest of the family got up, and returned well after dinner every night-a constant reminder that the debacle at the Quidditch World Cup wasn't over.

"It's been an absolute uproar," Percy told them importantly the evening before they were due to return to Hogwarts. "I've been putting out fires all week. People keep sending Howlers, and of course, if you don't open a Howler straight away, it explodes. Scorch marks all over my desk and my best quill reduced to cinders."

"Why are they all sending Howlers?" asked Ginny, who was mending her copy of *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi* with Spellotape on the rug in front of the living room fire.

"Complaining about security at the World Cup," said Percy. "They want compensation for their ruined property. Mundungus Fletcher's put in a claim for a twelve-bedroomed tent with en-suite Jacuzzi, but I've got his number. I know for a fact he was sleeping under a cloak propped on sticks."

Mrs. Weasley glanced at the grandfather clock in the corner. As a time tracking device it was useless, but otherwise it was very informative. It had nine golden hands, and each of them was engraved with one of the Weasley family's names, and instead of numerals, the clock had descriptions of where each family member might be. "Home," "school," and "work" were there, but there was

also "travelling," "lost," "hospital," "prison," and, in the position where the number twelve would be on a normal clock, "mortal peril." Eight of the hands were currently pointing to the "home" position, but Mr. Weasley's, which was the longest, was still pointing to "work."

Mrs. Weasley sighed.

"Your father hasn't had to go into the office on weekends since the days of You-Know-Who," she said. "They're working him far too hard. His dinner's going to be ruined if he doesn't come home soon."

"Well, Father feels he's got to make up for his mistake at the match, doesn't he?" said Percy. "If truth be told, he was a tad unwise to make a public statement without clearing it with his Head of Department first-"

"Don't you dare blame your father for what that wretched Skeeter woman wrote!" said Mrs. Weasley, flaring up at once.

"If Dad hadn't said anything, old Rita would just have said it was disgraceful that nobody from the Ministry had commented," said Bill, who was playing chess with Ron. "Rita Skeeter never makes anyone look good. Remember, she interviewed all the Gringotts' Charm Breakers once, and called me 'a long-haired pillock'?"

"Well, it is a bit long, dear," said Mrs. Weasley gently. "If you'd just let me-"

" *No*, Mum."

Hermione took a pause from reading her copy of *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 4* . Rain was lashing against the living room window. Charlie was darning a fireproof balaclava. Harry had his Potions textbook open and was writing notes on a generic Muggle notebook. He also had the *Daily Prophet* article by Rita Skeeter on his lap; the headline was:

SCENES OF TERROR AT THE QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

The black-and-white photograph under the headline showed the Robertses floating high in midair, underneath a crowd of hooded and masked wizards who were pointing their wands at them, as tents

burned and blew off to the edges.

Hermione shuddered as she remembered the scene in the photo. It had been a sickening sight. There was screaming everywhere, people fleeing from a growing group of masked wizards, who were laughing and pointing up at four floating, struggling figures that were being contorted into grotesque shapes. It was as though the masked wizards on the ground were puppeteers, and the people above them were marionettes operated by invisible strings that rose from the wands into the air. Occasionally, a wizard blasted a tent out of his way with his wand. Several caught fire. The screaming grew louder, and so did the drunken laughter and jeers. Then a burning tent illuminated the levitating figures. Hermione recognised one of them: Mr. Roberts, the Muggle campsite manager. The other three looked as though they might be his wife and children. One of the marchers below flipped Mrs. Roberts upside down with his wand; her nightdress fell down to reveal her underwear and she struggled to cover herself up as the crowd below her screeched and hooted with glee. Hermione had to turn away when she caught sight of the smallest Muggle child, who had begun to spin like a top, sixty feet above the ground, his head flopping limply from side to side.

"Oh your father's coming!" said Mrs. Weasley suddenly, looking up at the clock again.

Mr. Weasley's hand had suddenly spun from "work" to "travelling"; a second later it had shuddered to a halt on "home" with the others, and they heard him calling from the kitchen.

"Coming, Arthur!" called Mrs. Weasley, hurrying out of the room.

A few moments later, Mr. Weasley came into the warm living room carrying his dinner on a tray. He looked completely exhausted.

"Well, the fat's really in the fire now," he told Mrs. Weasley as he sat down in an armchair near the hearth and toyed unenthusiastically with his somewhat shriveled cauliflower. "Rita Skeeter's been ferreting around all week, looking for more Ministry mess-ups to report. And now she's found out about poor Bertha Jorkins going missing, so that'll be the headline in the *Prophet* tomorrow. I told Bagman he should have sent someone to look for her ages ago."

"Mr. Crouch has been saying it for weeks and weeks," said Percy swiftly.

"We're lucky Jeremy broadcasted the incident on the MMN," said Mr. Weasley irritably. "At least people can see what *really* happened…"

"I thought we were all agreed that, as a Ministry of Magic contractor, Mr. Jeremy Shin *shouldn't* have released the footage to the public without first clearing it with Mr. Crouch," said Percy hotly.

"If you ask me, Mr. Crouch is very lucky Mr. Jeremy didn't reveal how he acted at the World Cup to the public!" said Hermione angrily. Because really, Mr. Crouch's behaviour had been *atrocious* ! He completely disregarded the Robertses Grandmaster Shin caught gently in midair and accused him of showmanship in front of the other Ministry people for failing to apprehend the marchers… as if it was his fault! The marchers Disapparated the moment someone shouted the Grandmaster was approaching; Mr. Shin barely had enough time to stop the Robertses from hitting the ground!

"Now look here, Hermione!" said Percy. "Mr. Crouch had every right to be angry. The Magical Mobile Network has *foreign* customers, and as the Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation, Mr. Crouch deserves to know all matters that have international repercussions so he can decide the proper course of action-"

"He didn't care about that at all!" said Hermione passionately. "All he did was attack Grandmaster Shin for acting on his own, when he saved all those poor Muggles!"

"I think you'd all better go upstairs and check that you've packed properly!" said Mrs. Weasley, breaking up the argument. "Come on now, all of you…"

Hermione reluctantly closed her book and went back upstairs with Ginny. The rain sounded even louder at the upper stories of the house, accompanied by loud whistling and moans from the wind, not to mention sporadic howls from the ghoul who lived in the attic.

Hermione was organizing her books in alphabetical order when Ginny made an appalled noise behind her.

"What is this supposed to be?"

She was holding up something that looked like a pink chiffon dress, with white and orange skirt panels under ruffled pink ones. The fabric looked a bit moldy and there was a tear on the seam that connected the torso to one of the pink panels.

There was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Weasley entered, carrying an armful of freshly laundered Hogwarts robes.

"Here you are," she said, sorting Ginny's into a pile. "Now, mind you pack them properly so they don't crease."

"Mum, why did you put this on my bed?" asked Ginny, still holding up the dress.

"That's for you. Dress robes."

" *What* ?" said Ginny, looking horror-struck.

"Dress robes!" repeated Mrs. Weasley. "It says on your school list that you're supposed to have dress robes this year… robes for formal occasions."

"But why did it have to be *pink* ?" Ginny wailed. "I have *red* hair! Pink *never* goes with red hair!"

"Because… well, I had to get yours secondhand, and there wasn't a lot of choice!" said Mrs. Weasley, flushing.

Hermione looked away. Money was a very sensitive subject to both Ginny and Ron. At least Ron was coming to his own on the subject, because his job at the MMN gave him independent means. Ginny didn't have that.

"Was there really nothing but *pink?* " Ginny wailed again.

"I suppose I could've gotten the maroon velvet one," said Mrs. Weasley angrily. "It had lovely lace on the collar and cuffs…"

Ginny was so appalled she was driven speechless.

"See, this was the best!" snapped Mrs. Weasley. "So stop complaining and pack it in!"

And with that she left the room, slamming the door behind her.

Almost immediately they heard Ron make a loud noise of disgust upstairs.

" *MUM* !" he howled. "WHY DID YOU BUY ME THIS DINKY LITTLE OWL? IT'S RUBBISH!"

Final Notes : Quidditch World Cup, check. Triwizard tournament hints, check. HRH turning into angry sensitive teenagers… *check* . Phew. I worry about GOF. *It's so long* . I don't want it to turn into a monster spanning thirty chapters. And when I consider the length of years 5, 6 and 7… (BOC headdesks).

Sirius has been watching a lot of Bond movies with John, can you tell?

Ginny and Ron should not let their mum do their shopping.

Many Unexpected Discoveries

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Eight: Many Unexpected Discoveries

Harry got a call from John the night before he boarded the Hogwarts Express. He hesitated, wondering if it was Sherlock masquerading as John, John calling him to tell him she was disappointed at him for his outburst (which, as painful as it was to admit, had been unwarranted), or… something else. Something more horrible.

Harry reluctantly put his MMN phone to his ear.

"Hey, babe," said John quietly.

Harry held his breath. It had been years since John used endearments to Harry, and he didn't know what it meant, John using it now.

"Are we good?" John asked.

" *Yes* !" said Harry immediately. "I was never angry at you! And I didn't… I know Sherlock didn't…"

John waited as Harry tried to come up with the right words.

"He, um, just meant that I don't *have* to stay around, right?" said Harry in a small voice.

"Yes," said John calmly. "I'm not saying this as an excuse for him, but Sherlock didn't want to see you stick around and feel useless when you could spend your time better enjoying Ron's company."

"But I couldn't do that! You're sick!" Harry protested.

"I'm *always* sick," said John flatly. "But just because *I'm* sick, doesn't mean *you* have to be miserable too. If you're going to be a doctor, you need to *get* that or you'll burn out."

Harry went silent. After a moment, he heard John sigh.

"Speaking of your future," John said, "Sherlock and I had a talk with Dumbledore and Snape. Not the two of them together and Sherlock did most of the talking."

Harry had a bad feeling about this.

"Relax, I said that I was there, didn't I?" John paused. "Alright, fine, it would've have helped, but we agreed to what he was going to say. Long story short, we said we're not going to allow Snape sabotage your Potions education."

Harry's heart took a huge leap. " *Really* ?"

"Yes. Now don't expect too much change in the classroom. He's still going to be a horrible teacher, there's just no going around it. But if he gives you zeros for no good reason, or if he gives you a *look* or mutters *something* that's derogatory around you-and that's from your POV, not his-then we're going to talk to the Press."

Harry marvelled. John and Sherlock *hated* the Press. Yet they must've thought it was worth braving.

"Sorry, Harry, we should've done this earlier," said John softly. "I thought… I hoped, at bare minimum, Snape would ignore you and mark you as harshly as everyone else. Apparently I gave him too much credit."

"I don't care," said Harry hotly. "As long as he doesn't look at me or talk to me, I don't care. That's good enough."

"You have really high expectations, don't you? And *NOPE*," John barked suddenly, making Harry jump. "You're not going to skive off when I had to listen to you rake Snape over the coals. You're going to do your hard part!"

Bewildered, Harry turned on the holograph function of his phone.

The projected image showed John tugging hard on an arm Harry recognised as Sherlock's. It was amusing to see Sherlock putting up such a fight and refuse to come into view. As he watched, John did a huge tug and Sherlock tumbled backwards and fell on the floor.

"It's okay," said Harry, laughing at the curly hair on the bottom edge of the holograph. "I know what you meant."

"… Yes, obviously," said Sherlock stiffly. "Now do prove your difficulty with Potions is mostly the fault of the teacher, not any lack of effort or talent from your part. I hate to be corrected later."

"I will," Harry promised fiercely.

Heavy rain was still splattering against the windows when Harry woke up the next morning. But he was feeling none of the gloom he felt this past week as he got dressed in dark jeans and collared shirt. This school year was going to be *different*, he just knew it.

He, Ron, Fred and George entered the kitchen together. Mrs. Weasley was adding more buttered toast to the stack on the kitchen table. Ginny and Hermione were already there, eating porridge, and Mr. Weasley was reading the paper.

"Good Morning, boys," said Mr. Weasley, smiling over the *Daily Prophet* .

"Morning, Dad. So how are we going to London? The car?" asked Fred as he spread marmalade to his toast.

"Yes, your father is driving us," said Mrs. Weasley as she started frying up eggs. "I do hope everyone can fit in… there's going to be-goodness, ten of us at least."

Bill, Charlie and Percy soon joined everyone at kitchen table. Bill and Charlie decided to come and see everyone off at King's Cross station, but Percy, apologising most profusely, said that he really needed to get to work.

"I just can't justify taking more time off at the moment," he told them. "Mr. Crouch is really starting to rely on me."

"Yeah, you know what, Percy?" said George seriously. "I reckon he'll know your name soon."

After everyone ate their full of breakfast, they entered the rain-soaked yard to load their trunks in the Mr. Weasley's Turquoise Ford Anglia. Several Filibuster's Fabulous No-Heat, Wet-Start Fireworks went off unexpectedly when Fred's trunk sprang open, causing Ron to yell with pain when Crookshanks clawed his way up his leg. It took a while for Crookshanks to recover from the fireworks and rain, and by the time everyone got into the car and Mr. Weasley turned on the ignition, Harry, Ron, and Hermione were all severely scratched.

The journey to London was very noisy, owing to the fact Ron's new owl was making an ear-splitting racket.

"Shut up, Pig," said Ron irritably at the tiny owl, who zoomed around inside its cage, twittering madly.

"Why'd you decided to name it 'Pig'?" asked Harry, thinking some variation of 'Feathery Snitch' would've have been more appropriate.

"He's just being stupid," said Ginny from the front passenger seat. "Its proper name is Pigwidgeon."

"Yeah, that's not a stupid name at all," said Ron sarcastically. "Ginny named him," he added. "She reckons it's sweet. I tried to change it, but he won't answer. So he's Pig."

They arrived at London fifteen minutes before eleven. Everyone was relieved to get out of the car, though the rain was pouring down harder than ever. As Harry, eight Weasleys and Hermione left Mr. Weasley's Ford Anglia and removed six sets of trunks from its small

boot, Harry fervently hoped no Muggle would pay even a fraction of attention to them, because they would instantly notice something was seriously strange about their group.

Everyone got soaked on their way to the King's Cross station, but thankfully no one asked them about impossible car loading stunts. Sherlock, John and Sirius were waiting for them at the solid barrier dividing platforms nine and ten, which served as the gateway to the hidden platform nine and three quarters. Sirius was dressed in a black leather jacket, T-shirt and dark trousers as usual. Sherlock and John on the other hand, looked quite different from their normal selves. Sherlock was wearing a tie for one thing, and instead of a tailored jacket, he was wearing a grey cardigan. He'd also groomed his hair to part on the left and settle in elegant waves. As for John, she was wearing the long blonde wig that reached pass the shoulder-blades and a stylish maternity dress of navy blue.

"Are you going undercover?" asked Harry as Ron and Hermione lined up against the barrier.

"I'm a rising lawyer at a private London firm; Escott by name," Sherlock confirmed. "I've been commissioned to locate and retrieve certain documents from Appledore & Melverton Associates."

"How are you going to-" Harry caught the twinkle in Sirius's eye. "… Never mind. I shouldn't ask."

"Plausible deniability," John agreed.

The Hogwarts Express, a gleaming scarlet steam engine, was already there at platform nine and three quarters. Clouds of steam billowing from it, through which the many Hogwarts students and parents on the platform appeared like dark ghosts. Pigwidgeon became noisier than ever in response to the hooting of many owls through the mist. Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off to find seats, and met Julia Lestrade and her father, Detective Chief Inspector Lestrade, at a compartment halfway along the train.

"My Dad knows how to Apparate now," said Julia proudly after greeting them.

"No, I don't," Mr. Lestrade denied affably. Then he started at the sight of Sherlock and John. "What the bloody hell are two up to? Why are you-" he stopped. "-No, don't tell me. *I don't want to know* ."

"You really don't," John agreed.

Harry, Ron and Hermione stowed their luggage inside Julia's compartment. They then hopped back down onto the platform to say good-bye to Sherlock and John, Sirius, Mr. Lestrade, Mrs. Weasley, Bill, and Charlie.

"I might be seeing you all sooner than you think," said Charlie, grinning, as he hugged Ginny good-bye.

"Why?" Fred said keenly.

"You'll see," said Charlie. "Just don't tell Percy I mentioned it… its ' *classified information, until such time as the Ministry sees fit to release it*,' after all."

"Yeah, I sort of wish I were back at Hogwarts this year," said Bill, hands in his pockets, looking almost wistfully at the train.

"Why?" George said impatiently.

"You're going to have an interesting year," said Mr. Lestrade, his dark eyes twinkling. "I might get time off to come and watch it."

"Watch what?" asked Julia.

But at that moment, the whistle blew, and Mrs. Weasley chivvied them toward the train doors. All the magic adults kept mum on the subject to the very end, only smiling and waving when Fred bellowed: " *Tell us what's happening at Hogwarts! What rules are they changing?* " as the train sped up. Then they Disapparated before the train rounded the corner.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Julia went back to their compartment. The thick rain splattering the windows made it very difficult to see out of them. Ron undid his trunk, pulled out one of his school robes, and flung them over Pigwidgeon's cage to muffle his hooting.

"Bagman wanted to tell us what's happening at Hogwarts," he said grumpily, sitting down next to Harry. "At the World Cup before Crouch shut him up, remember? But my own mother won't say. Wonder what it is."

"Whatever it is, Uncle Jeremy and Auntie Jack are involved in it too," said Julia. "Mind, Auntie Jack is really grumpy and Uncle Jeremy is really excited, so I think it's-"

" *Shh* !" Hermione whispered suddenly, pressing her finger to her lips and pointing toward the compartment next to theirs. Harry, Ron and Julia listened, and heard a familiar drawling voice drifting in through the open door.

"… Father actually considered sending me to Durmstrang rather than Hogwarts, you know. He knows the headmaster, you see. Well, you know his opinion of Dumbledore - the man's such a Mudblood-lover - and Durmstrang doesn't admit that sort of riffraff. But Mother didn't like the idea of me going to school so far away. Father says Durmstrang takes a far more sensible line than Hogwarts about the Dark Arts. Durmstrang students actually *learn* them, not just the defence rubbish we do…"

Hermione got up, tiptoed to the compartment door, and slid it shut, blocking out Malfoy's voice.

"So he thinks Durmstrang would have suited him, does he?" she said angrily. "I wish he had gone. Then we wouldn't have to put up with him."

"Durmstrang's another wizarding school?" said Harry.

"Yes," said Hermione, sniffing disdainfully. "It has a horrible reputation. According to An Appraisal of Magical Education in Europe, it puts a lot of emphasis on the Dark Arts."

"I think I've heard of it," said Ron vaguely. "Where is it? What country?"

"Well, nobody knows, do they?" said Hermione, raising her eyebrows.

"Er-why not?"

"There's traditionally been a lot of rivalry between all the magic schools," said Hermione matter-of-factly. "Durmstrang and Beauxbatons conceal their whereabouts so nobody can steal their secrets. I think they're also unplottable, to keep foreign wizards from finding it…"

"Come again?"

"Well, you can enchant a building so it's impossible to plot on a map, can't you?"

"Er… if you say so," said Ron.

"But I think Durmstrang must be somewhere in the far north," said Hermione thoughtfully. "Somewhere very cold, because they've got fur capes as part of their uniforms."

"Ah, think of the possibilities," said Ron dreamily. "It would've been so easy to push Malfoy off a glacier and make it look like an accident… Shame his mother likes him…"

The rain became heavier and heavier as the train moved farther north. The sky was so dark and the windows so steamy that the lanterns were lit by midday. Several of their friends looked in on them as the afternoon progressed, including Seamus Finnigan, Dean Thomas, and Neville Longbottom. Seamus was still wearing his Ireland rosette, which was still squeaking " *Troy - Mullet - Moran!* " but in a very feeble and exhausted sort of way. After half an hour or so, Hermione, growing tired of the endless Quidditch talk, buried herself once more in *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 4*, and started trying to learn a Summoning Charm.

Seamus and Dean eventually left, though Neville stayed behind to talk some more.

"Uncle Algie bought a new wand for me," he said, proudly showing it to them, "Cherry wood and unicorn hair, ten inches."

"What happened to your old wand?" asked Harry.

"I, um, lost it," said Neville, turning very red, "At the World Cup. Gran was very displeased."

The afternoon melted slowly into evening. Ron started talking wistfully about the start of term feast, and Julia gloomily dreaded it (as a vegetarian, Julia had a hard time with Hogwarts' meat-and-poultry dominated cookery).

Harry was thinking about having a word with Blippy and the Hogwarts House-elves when someone far less pleasant than Seamus and Dean entered their compartment…

"Why are you here, Lestrange?"

Hermione looked up from her reading and found Draco Malfoy at the doorway. Behind him stood Crabbe and Goyle, his enormous, thuggish cronies, both of whom appeared to have grown at least a foot during the summer.

Julia, whom Malfoy was addressing, pretended she didn't hear him and started to clean the lenses of her glasses carefully.

"Don't remember asking you to join us, Malfoy," said Harry coolly.

"You can't be eager to join the likes of Weasley and Longbottom," said Malfoy, throwing a scornful look at Ron and Neville. "I know you're fairly new to the Wizarding World proper, but didn't your uncles teach you better?"

"Eat dung, Malfoy!" snarled Ron, turning as red as his Christmas jumpers, while Neville balled up his fists.

Julia just kept cleaning the lenses of her glasses, as though she had suddenly turned deaf. Malfoy narrowed his eyes slightly and then turned to Ron again.

"So… going to enter, Weasley? Going to try and bring a bit of glory to the family name? There's money involved as well, you know… you'd be able to afford new things if you won…"

"What are you talking about?" snapped Ron, stuffing his second-hand school robes back into his trunk.

"Are you going to enter?" Malfoy repeated. "I suppose you will, Potter? You never miss a chance to show off, do you?"

"Either explain what you're on about or go away, Malfoy," said Hermione testily.

A gleeful smile spread across Malfoy's pale face

"Don't tell me you don't *know* ?" he said delightedly. "You've got a father and brother at the Ministry and you don't even *know* ? My God, my father told me about it ages ago… heard it from Cornelius Fudge. But then, Father's always associated with the top people at the Ministry… Maybe your father's too junior to know about it, Weasley… yes… they probably don't talk about important stuff in front of *him*… "

Laughing once more, Malfoy beckoned to Crabbe and Goyle, and the three of them made moves to leave.

"I win. Sorry, Julia, pay up," said Harry loudly.

Malfoy stopped. Julia looked up.

"Oh, *fine*," she said, tossing a silver Sickle at Harry, who caught it one-handed.

"What are you talking about?" said Malfoy, his eyes narrowing to slits.

"I bet Julia here you wouldn't pass the chance to taunt us about the ' *friendly inter-school competition* ' Hogwarts, Durmstrang and Beauxbatons are going to enter this year," said Harry calmly.

"And I said you can't be that boring," said Julia, sighing a little. "Must you be?"

Malfoy flushed pale pink. Then, angry and abashed, he stalked off, Crabbe and Goyle blundering stupidly after him.

"You knew what Malfoy was harping on about! How did you know?" Ron said as soon as he shut the compartment door again.

"I didn't know, I figured it out," said Harry.

" *How?* " said Hermione, Ron and Neville together.

"Ron's brother Percy has been hinting about a top-secret event he's working on all summer," Harry explained. "Bagman and Crouch mentioned it, too, in their own way at the World Cup. Mrs. Weasley said something exciting is happening in Hogwarts this year. What kind of event could happen in Hogwarts this year that needs the Department of International Magical Cooperation, where Percy and Crouch works at, and the Department of Magical Games and Sports, where Bagman is head? Some kind of inter-school competition, with foreign school teams coming over to Hogwarts to compete against us."

Hermione clapped her forehead. "Of course! I see it now! But the bet! When did you two make it?"

"We didn't," said Julia. "I just went along because Harry sounded like he knew what he was talking about."

"Sorry for springing it at you like that," said Harry apologetically.

"I didn't mind," said Julia, smiling.

"It could've ended badly if Malfoy used his brains a bit," said Harry wryly. "I couldn't figure out what kind of competition. So I threw in the names Durmstrang and Beauxbatons to make it sound like I knew what it was about. If Hermione hadn't mentioned those foreign schools earlier, I would've sounded too vague."

"No, you wouldn't have," said Neville stoutly.

"Yeah, *inter-school competition*, that definitely sounds too specific," agreed Ron. "So what do you reckon? Think Hogwarts would be holding Quidditch matches against Durmstrang and Beauxbatons, like in the World Cup?"

"Maybe. But Malfoy made it sound like it was an individual thing…"

"Well, if it's Quidditch, I'd like to try out for the team, maybe as Keeper," said Ron. "I've still got some gold left over from the World Cup viewer project. Maybe it'll be enough to buy me a Cleansweep Seven."

"How much did you get?"

Ron smirked a little. "Three thousand Galleons."

"Three *thousand* !?" Hermione exclaimed. "How did you make that much? And how did you spend it all so quickly?"

"I'm entitled to a percentage of the profits for all the projects I lead," Ron explained. Then his ears turned a bit pink. "I gave most of it to Mum and Dad. They needed it."

"Why?" asked Harry.

"Er, turns out Dad took out a loan to buy the car," said Ron, his ears turning pinker still. "He's also got this plastic card thing he uses to buy stuff from Muggle shops. Someone told him a lot of Muggles use it to buy things, and he liked it better than Muggle money because it was easier to deal with. Only the company he got the card from, they sent us the bills through Muggle mail, and the Muggle postman didn't know how to find our house because he never delivered to our address, so…"

"Oh dear," said Julia sympathetically.

"Well, it's all settled now," said Ron, collapsing back to his seat. "Julia's dad taught my dad how to pay it all off. Dad said your dad knew a lot about Muggle loans and banks."

"He *would*," muttered Julia.

They changed into their school robes after this. The train slowed down, and finally stopped in the pitch-darkness of Hogsmeade station. As the train doors opened, there was a rumble of thunder overhead. Hermione bundled up Crookshanks in her cloak and Ron wrapped his school robe around Pigwidgeon's cage as they left the train, heads bent and eyes narrowed against the downpour. The rain was now coming down so thick and fast that it was as though

buckets of ice-cold water were being emptied repeatedly over their heads.

"Hi, Hagrid!" yelled Harry at a gigantic silhouette at the far end of the platform.

"All righ', Harry?" Hagrid bellowed back, waving. "See yeh at the feast if we don' drown!"

"Oooh, I wouldn't fancy crossing the lake in this weather," said Hermione fervently, shivering as they inched slowly along the dark platform with the majority of the crowd as the first years were led towards to the lake, where they'd to be taken to Hogwarts castle by small enchanted boats. A hundred horseless carriages stood waiting for them outside the station. Hermione, Harry, Ron, Julia and Neville climbed gratefully into one of them, the door shut with a snap, and a few moments later, with a great lurch, the long procession of carriages was rumbling and splashing its way up the track toward Hogwarts Castle.

"I didn't know those horse-things were tame," said Harry as the carriages trundled, swaying dangerously in what was fast becoming a gale.

"What horse-things? These carriages aren't pulled by horses!" said Hermione.

"Yeah they are," said Harry, frowning. "Can't you see them?"

"Nope," said Ron.

"I can," said Julia.

"Me too, I can see them, too," added Neville.

There was a moment of silence as the five of them stared at each other.

"How can there be a horse only three of us can see?" said Ron incredulously.

"But I do see them!" said Harry. "Neville and Julia, the horses, they

have dragon-faces and look like they need a lot of feeding, right?"

"Yes, and they have glowing white eyes and fangs for teeth," said Julia, adding more ominous details.

"And leathery wings," Neville said.

"That doesn't sound like a horse," muttered Ron.

"It also has four legs and a long, hairy black tail," added Julia helpfully.

"That still doesn't sound like a horse," Ron argued.

It finally clicked in Hermione's head.

"Oooh, I think I know what you three are seeing! Thestrals!"

" *What* ?" said Harry and Julia, bewildered.

"Aren't those bad luck?" said Ron in alarm while Neville squeaked.

"That's just superstition, just like Grims," said Hermione impatiently. To Harry and Julia, she said: "Thestrals are a type of winged-horse. The only people who can see Thestrals are people who have seen death. I didn't know they could be tamed, though. I wish I could see them…"

As soon as she said this, Hermione noticed the shuttered look on Harry's face. Then she realised what she'd just said and was horror-struck.

"Oh, Harry, I'm sorry! I didn't mean-"

"No, it's fine," said Harry. "I know you didn't mean anything by it."

There was a bit of a pause.

"So you two can see them, too," Harry said, nodding at Neville and Julia. "I don't know if this is okay to ask, but… who?"

"My granddad," said Neville.

"There's not one in particular," Julia replied, and when everyone stared at her, she elaborated: "The thing about having a police officer for a Dad is that you end up going to a lot of funerals."

Ron looked as lost for words as Hermione after that statement. Harry, on the other hand, was looking at Julia as though suddenly seeing her in a whole new light.

"Yeah, that makes sense…" he muttered.

Then Harry turned to lean against the window, where one could see Hogwarts coming nearer, its many lighted windows blurred and shimmering behind the thick curtain of rain.

Lightning flashed across the sky as Hermione, Harry, Ron, Julia and Neville's carriage came to a halt before the great oak front doors, which stood at the top of a flight of stone steps. People who had occupied the carriages in front were already hurrying up the stone steps into the castle. The five of them jumped down from their carriage and dashed up the steps too, looking up only when they were safely inside the cavernous, torch-lit entrance hall, with its magnificent marble staircase.

"Blimey," said Ron, shaking his head and sending water everywhere, "if that keeps up the lake's going to overflow. I'm soak-ARRGH!"

A large, red, water-filled balloon had dropped from out of the ceiling onto Ron's head and exploded. Drenched and sputtering, Ron staggered sideways into Harry, just as a second water bomb dropped- narrowly missing Hermione, but bursting on Harry's trainers. People all around them shrieked and started pushing one another in their efforts to get out of the line of fire. Hermione looked up and saw, floating twenty feet above them, Peeves the Poltergeist, a little man in a bell-covered hat and orange bow tie, his wide, malicious face contorted with concentration as he took aim again.

"PEEVES!" yelled an angry voice. "Peeves, stop that at ONCE!"

Professor McGonagall had come dashing out of the Great Hall; she skidded on the wet floor and grabbed Hermione around the neck to stop from falling.

"Ouch-sorry, Miss Granger-"

"That's all right, Professor!" Hermione gasped, massaging her throat.

"Peeves, stop right NOW!" barked Professor McGonagall, straightening her pointed hat and glaring upward through her square-rimmed spectacles.

"Not doing nothing!" cackled Peeves, lobbing a water bomb at several fifth-year girls, who screamed and dived into the Great Hall. "Already wet, aren't they? Little squirts! Wheeeeeeeeee!" And he aimed another bomb at a group of second years who had just arrived.

"I shall call Filch and the headmaster!" shouted Professor McGonagall. " *I'm warning you, Peeves* -"

Peeves was sticking his tongue out when Julia tossed a blood-red card at him.

Many Hufflepuffs cheered when the card started chasing after Peeves, who zoomed off up the marble staircase, dropping the rest of his balloons on the empty stairs whilst screaming in terror.

"What is that?" asked Ron, awed.

"I don't know," said Julia, looking as surprised as Ron. "Grandpa said I should use it if Peeves is irritating."

"He's teaching you magic?" asked Hermione jealously.

"Uh, kind of," said Julia, blushing. "I always liked his way of magic better because there's not as much rote memorization…"

"Well, move along!" said Professor McGonagall sharply to the bedraggled crowd. "Into the Great Hall, come on!"

Everyone slipped and slid across the entrance hall and through the double doors on the right.

The Great Hall looked its usual splendid self, decorated for the start-of-term feast. Golden plates and goblets gleamed by the light of hundreds and hundreds of candles, floating over the tables in midair. The four long House tables were packed with chattering students; at the top of the Hall, the staff sat along one side of a fifth table, facing their pupils. It was much warmer in here. Harry, Ron, Hermione, Julia and Neville walked past the Slytherins and the Ravenclaws, Julia joined the Hufflepuffs, and the remaining four of them sat down with the rest of the Gryffindors at the far side of the Hall, next to Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor ghost.

"Good evening," he said, beaming at them.

"Says who?" said Harry, taking off his trainers and emptying them of water. "Hope they hurry up with the Sorting. I'm starving."

Hermione looked up at the staff table. There seemed to be rather more empty seats there than usual. Hagrid, of course, was still fighting his way across the lake with the first years; Professor McGonagall was presumably supervising the drying of the entrance hall floor. Hermione scrutinized the staff table more carefully, and counted exactly two empty seats. The expected professors were present. Professor Dumbledore was in the middle; his long, thin fingers were together and he was resting his chin upon them, staring up at the ceiling through his half-moon spectacles as though lost in thought. Tiny little Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, was sitting on a large pile of cushions beside Professor Sprout, the Herbology teacher, whose hat was askew over her flyaway grey hair. She was talking to Professor Sinistra of the Astronomy department. On Professor Sinistra's other side was the sallow-faced, hook-nosed, greasy-haired Potions master, Snape.

Snape was Harry, Ron and Neville's least favourite person in Hogwarts, and Hermione shared their dislike, if not their outright loathing (Ron) or fear (Neville). It was difficult to hold the man in any regard when he singled out some students for bullying, others for favouritism and was downright cruel to everyone else.

Hermione felt herself frowning. Perhaps it was just her imagination, but Snape seemed to regarding Harry with, if possible, greater intensity of hatred than usual. Normally Snape regarded Harry like a disgusting species of vermin he wished to squash, but now he was glaring at Harry as though he'd killed his best friend.

"Oh hurry up," Ron moaned, interrupting Hermione's thoughts, "I could eat a hippogriff."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the doors of the Great Hall opened and silence fell. Professor McGonagall was leading a long line of first years up to the top of the Hall. If Harry, Ron, and Hermione were wet, it was nothing to how these first years looked. They appeared to have swum across the lake rather than sailed.

Professor McGonagall brought out the old Sorting Hat, which sang the annual Sorting Song. Harry, who through a combination of extremely unfortunate circumstances was unable to attend any sorting except his own until today, watched and listened the proceedings with deep fascination. Soon Sorting started; boys and girls with varying degrees of fright on their faces moving one by one to the three-legged stool, the line dwindling slowly as Professor McGonagall called out their names.

"Oh c'mon," Ron moaned, massaging his stomach, as Professor McGonagall passed the L's.

"Now, Ron, the Sorting's much more important than food," said Nearly Headless Nick as "Madley, Laura!" became a Hufflepuff.

"Course it is, if you're dead," snapped Ron.

"I do hope this year's batch of Gryffindors are up to scratch," said Nearly Headless Nick, applauding as "McDonald, Natalie!" joined the Gryffindor table. "We don't want to break our winning streak, do we?"

Professor McGonagall continued to call out names. Pritchard, Graham… Quirke, Orla…

And finally, with "Whitby, Kevin!" ("HUFFLEPUFF!"), the Sorting ended. Professor McGonagall picked up the hat and the stool and carried them away.

"About time," said Ron, seizing his knife and fork and looking expectantly at his golden plate.

Professor Dumbledore had gotten to his feet. He was smiling around at the students, his arms opened wide in welcome.

"I have only two words to say to you," he told them, his deep voice echoing around the Hall. " *Tuck in* ."

"Hear, hear!" said Harry and Ron loudly as the empty dishes filled magically before their eyes.

Nearly Headless Nick watched mournfully as everyone loaded their plates.

"Aaah, 'at's be'er," said Ron, with his mouth full of mashed potato.

"You're lucky there's a feast at all tonight, you know," said Nearly Headless Nick. "There was trouble in the kitchens earlier."

"Why? Wha' 'appened?" said Harry, through a sizable chunk of steak.

"Peeves, of course," said Nearly Headless Nick, shaking his head, which wobbled dangerously. He pulled his ruff a little higher up on his neck. "The usual argument, you know. He wanted to attend the feast-well, it's quite out of the question, you know what he's like, utterly uncivilized, can't see a plate of food without throwing it. We held a ghost's council-the Fat Friar was all for giving him the chance-but most wisely, in my opinion, the Bloody Baron put his foot down."

The Bloody Baron was the Slytherin ghost, a gaunt and silent specter covered in silver bloodstains. He was the only person at Hogwarts who could really control Peeves.

"Yeah, we thought Peeves seemed hacked off about something," said Ron darkly. "So what did he do in the kitchens?"

"Oh the usual," said Nearly Headless Nick, shrugging. "Wreaked havoc and mayhem. Pots and pans everywhere. Place swimming in soup. Terrified the house-elves out of their wits."

"Poor Blippy and the rest," said Hermione sympathetically. "We better go see them and cheer them up."

"Oh, I'm not sure that's wise," said Nearly Headless Nick. "I mean, you're not supposed to *see* them, are you? That's the mark of a good house-elf, isn't it, that you don't know it's there?"

Hermione stared at him.

"But they love it when we pay them a visit and compliment them for doing a great job! I mean, why wouldn't they?"

Nearly Headless Nick chortled so much that his ruff slipped and his head flopped off, dangling on the inch or so of ghostly skin and muscle that still attached it to his neck.

"I'm sorry, but that was unusually naïve, coming from you," he said, pushing his head back onto his shoulders and securing it once more with his ruff. " *Of course* House-elves love the compliments; they're born to serve!"

Feeling deeply offended but unable to articulate why, Hermione huffed and turned to her food.

When the puddings too had been demolished, and the last crumbs had faded off the plates, leaving them sparkling clean, Albus Dumbledore got to his feet again. The buzz of chatter filling the Hall ceased almost at once, so that only the howling wind and pounding rain could be heard.

"So!" said Dumbledore, smiling around at them all. "Now that we are all fed and watered, I must once more ask for your attention, while I give out a few notices. Mr. Filch, the caretaker, has asked me to tell you that the list of objects forbidden inside the castle has this year been extended to include Screaming Yo-yos, Fanged Frisbees, and Ever-Bashing Boomerangs. The full list comprises some four hundred and thirty-seven items, I believe, and can be viewed in Mr.

Filch's office, if anybody would like to check it."

The corners of Dumbledore's mouth twitched. Then he continued, "As ever, I would like to remind you all that the forest on the grounds is out-of-bounds to students, as is the village of Hogsmeade to all below third year.

"It is also my painful duty to inform you that the Inter-House Quidditch Cup will not take place this year."

" *What?* " Harry gasped. He looked around at Fred and George, his fellow members of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. They were mouthing soundlessly at Dumbledore, apparently too appalled to speak.

Dumbledore went on, "This is due to an event that will be starting in October, and continuing throughout the school year, taking up much of the teachers' time and energy- but I am sure you will all enjoy it immensely. I have great pleasure in announcing that this year at Hogwarts the Triwizard Tournament will be taking place."

"You're *JOKING* !" said Fred Weasley loudly.

The outrage that filled the Hall over the cancelled Inter-House Quidditch Cup suddenly broke. Nearly everyone laughed, and Dumbledore chuckled appreciatively.

"I am not joking, Mr. Weasley," he said, "though now that you mention it, I did hear an excellent one over the summer about a troll, a hag, and a leprechaun who all go into a bar…"

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat loudly.

"Er- but maybe this is not the time… no…" said Dumbledore, "where was I? Ah yes, the Triwizard Tournament… well, some of you will not know what this tournament involves, so I hope those who do know will forgive me for giving a short explanation, and allow their attention to wander freely."

Dumbledore launched a short history and background about the Triwizard Tournament. Hermione was familiar with the content, though she hadn't known the tournament was discontinued because

the death toll was too high (*Death Toll?!* Whose!?). However, this summer, the Department of International Magical Cooperation and Magical Game and Sports thought time was ripe for another attempt and worked tirelessly to ensure no champion would endanger their life doing the three magical tasks they'd be assigned to do.

"The heads of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving with their short-listed contenders in October, and the selection of the three champions will take place at Halloween," said Dumbledore. "An impartial judge will decide which students are worthiest to compete for the Triwizard Cup, the glory of their school, and a thousand Galleons personal prize money."

"I'm going for it!" Fred Weasley hissed down the table, his face lit with enthusiasm at the prospect of such glory and riches, which was shared throughout the Hall. But then Dumbledore spoke again, and the Hall quieted once more.

"Eager though I know all of you will be to bring the Triwizard Cup to Hogwarts," he said, "the heads of the participating schools, along with the Ministry of Magic, have agreed to impose an age restriction on contenders this year. Only students who are of age- that is to say, seventeen years or older-will be allowed to put forward their names for consideration. This-" Dumbledore raised his voice slightly, for several people had made noises of outrage at these words, and the Weasley twins were suddenly looking furious-"is a measure we feel is necessary, given that the tournament tasks will still be difficult and dangerous, whatever precautions we take, and it is highly unlikely that students below sixth and seventh year will be able to cope with them. I will personally be ensuring that no underage student hoodwinks our impartial judge into making them Hogwarts champion." His light blue eyes twinkled as they flickered over Fred's and George's mutinous faces. "I therefore beg you not to waste your time submitting yourself if you are under seventeen.

"The delegations from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving in October and remaining with us for the greater part of this year. I know that you will all extend every courtesy to our foreign guests while they are with us, and will give your whole-hearted support to the Hogwarts champion when he or she is selected. And now, it is late, and I know how important it is to you all to be alert and rested

as you enter your lessons tomorrow morning. Bedtime! Chop chop!"

"They can't do that!" said George Weasley, who had not joined the crowd moving toward the door, but was standing up and glaring at Dumbledore. "We're seventeen in April, why can't we have a shot?"

"They're not stopping me entering," said Fred stubbornly, also scowling at the top table. "The champions'll get to do all sorts of stuff you'd never be allowed to do normally. And a thousand Galleons prize money!"

"Doesn't sound enough to risk your life for," said Ron.

"Yeah, you would say that, Mr. Business Director of the Magical Mobile Network," Fred retorted.

"Hey!"

"Come on," said Hermione, interrupting the fight, "we'll be the only ones left here if you don't move."

Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville, Fred and George set off for the entrance hall, Fred and George debating the ways in which Dumbledore might stop those who were under seventeen from entering the tournament. Harry, who apparently written off the topic as something entirely irrelevant to him, eyed the stairway leading to the kitchens.

"Wanna take a quick trip before we go to bed?" he asked.

Neville and Ron shook their heads in the negative. Hermione, on the other hand, was all for it, so the two of them bid the other boys good night, went to the underground passage, and stopped in front of the picture of the giant fruit bowl. Harry stretched out his forefinger and tickled the huge green pear. It began to squirm, chuckling, and suddenly turned into a large green door handle. Harry seized it, and pulled the door open.

They had one brief glimpse of an enormous, high-ceilinged room, large as the Great Hall above it, when something small hurtled toward them from the middle of the room, squealing, " *Harry Potter, sir! Harry Potter!* "

Next second all the wind was knocked out of Harry as the squealing elf hit him hard in the midriff, hugging him so tightly the elf's short arms actually managed to encircle his entire ribcage.

"D-Dobby?" Harry gasped.

"It is Dobby, sir, it is!" squealed the elf, his face somewhere around Harry's navel. "Dobby has been hoping and hoping to see Harry Potter, sir, and Harry Potter has come to see him, sir!"

Dobby let go and stepped back a few paces, beaming up at Harry, his enormous, green, tennis-ball-shaped eyes brimming with tears of happiness. He looked almost exactly as Harry described him; the pencil-shaped nose, the batlike ears, the long fingers and feet-all except the clothes, which wasn't the filthy old pillowcase Harry said he'd worn when working for the Malfoys, nor was it a tea towel stamped with the Hogwarts crest tied like a toga like other Hogwarts elves. Instead he wearing a tea cosy for a hat, on which he had pinned a number of bright badges; a tie patterned with horseshoes over a bare chest, a pair of what looked like children's football shorts, and odd socks (one black and the other pink with orange stripes).

"Dobby, what're you doing here?" Harry said in amazement.

"Dobby has come to work at Hogwarts, sir!" Dobby squealed excitedly. "Professor Dumbledore gave Dobby and Winky jobs, sir!

"Winky?" said Harry. "Who's Winky?"

"Over here sir!" said Dobby, and he seized Harry's hand and pulled him off into the kitchen between the four long wooden tables that stood there. Hermione followed after them, nodding abstractly at the hundreds of bowing and curtseying House-elves as she did.

Dobby stopped in front of the brick fireplace and pointed.

"Winky, sir!" he said.

An elf was sitting on a stool by the fire. It had enormous brown eyes and a nose the exact size and shape of a large tomato. Though it was very difficult to tell with House-elves, Hermione had a feeling

this one might be a female who hadn't had to forage for clothes like Dobby, as she was wearing a neat little skirt and blouse with a matching blue hat, which had holes in it for her large ears. However, while every one of Dobby's strange collection of garments was so clean and well cared for that it looked brand-new, Winky was plainly not taking care of her clothes at all. There were soup stains all down her blouse and a burn in her skirt.

"Hello Winky," said Harry.

Winky's lip quivered. Then she burst into tears, which spilled out of her great brown eyes and splashed down her front.

"Oh dear," said Hermione, alarmed. "Winky, what's wrong?"

Winky just cried harder than ever. Dobby, on the other hand, beamed up at Harry.

"Would Harry Potter like a cup of tea?" he squeaked loudly, over Winky's sobs.

"Er… maybe not now, not when I'm due to bed soon. Maybe later," Harry quickly added at Dobby's crestfallen face. "Like, Saturday afternoon?"

"If Harry Potter and his friends comes Saturday afternoon for tea, Blippy will prepare the treacle tart Harry Potter is partial to," said Blippy, pushing Dobby to the side as he bowed deeply.

"Oh, uh, that'll be great, thanks," said Harry, staring. "So how long have you been here, Dobby?"

"Only a week, Harry Potter, sir!" said Dobby happily, stepping in front of Blippy and edging him away. "Dobby came to see Professor Dumbledore, sir. You see, sir, it is very difficult for a house-elf who has been dismissed to get a new position, sir, very difficult indeed-"

At this, Winky howled even harder, her squashed-tomato of a nose dribbling all down her front, though she made no effort to stem the flow.

"Dobby has travelled the country for two whole years, sir, trying to

find work!" Dobby squeaked, as he engaged in a shoving match with Blippy. "But Dobby hasn't found work, sir, because Dobby wants paying now!"

The house-elves all around the kitchen, who had been listening and watching with interest, all looked away at these words, as though Dobby had said something rude and embarrassing. Blippy in fact shuddered and stepped away from Dobby, as though he couldn't bear to stay in close contact.

"Why is that a problem?" asked Hermione, frowning.

"Most wizards doesn't want a house-elf who wants paying, miss. *'That's not the point of a house-elf,'* they says, and they slammed the door in Dobby's face! Dobby likes work, but he wants to wear clothes and he wants to be paid. Harry Potter… Dobby likes being free!"

All the Hogwarts house-elves had now started edging away from Dobby, as though he were carrying something contagious. Winky, however, remained where she was, though there was a definite increase in the volume of her crying.

"And then, Harry Potter, Dobby goes to visit Winky, and finds out Winky has been freed too, sir!" said Dobby delightedly.

At this, Winky flung herself forward off her stool and lay face-down on the flagged stone floor, beating her tiny fists upon it and positively screaming with misery. Hermione hastily dropped down to her knees beside her and tried to comfort her, but nothing she said made the slightest difference. Dobby continued with his story, shouting shrilly over Winky's screeches.

"And then Dobby had the idea, Harry Potter, sir! 'Why doesn't Dobby and Winky find work together?' Dobby says. 'Where is there enough work for two house-elves?' says Winky. And Dobby thinks, and it comes to him, sir! *Hogwarts* ! So Dobby and Winky came to see Professor Dumbledore, sir, and Professor Dumbledore took us on!"

Dobby beamed very brightly, and happy tears welled in his eyes again.

"And Professor Dumbledore says he will pay Dobby, sir, if Dobby wants paying! And so Dobby is a free elf, sir, and Dobby gets a Galleon a week and one day off a month!"

"That's not very much!" Hermione shouted indignantly from the floor, over Winky's continued screaming and fist-beating.

"Professor Dumbledore offered Dobby ten Galleons a week, and weekends off," said Dobby, suddenly giving a little shiver, as though the prospect of so much leisure and riches were frightening, "but Dobby beat him down, miss… Dobby likes freedom, miss, but he isn't wanting too much, miss, he likes work better."

"If you say so," said Harry, shaking his head a little. "What about you, Winky? Are you getting paid?"

Winky suddenly stopped crying, but when she sat up she was glaring at Harry through her massive brown eyes, her whole face sopping wet and suddenly furious.

"Winky is a disgraced elf, but Winky is not yet getting paid!" she squeaked. "Winky is not sunk so low as that! Winky is properly ashamed of being freed!"

"Ashamed?" said Hermione blankly. "But Winky, why are you ashamed of being free?"

"There is no greater shame to a house-elf than being free," moaned Winky, tears leaking down her face once more. "My poor master, what is he doing without Winky? He is needing me, he is needing my help! I is looking after the Crouches all my life, my mother is doing it before me, and my grandmother is doing it before her… oh what is they saying if they knew Winky was freed? Oh the shame, the *shame* !" She buried her face in her skirt again and bawled.

For long time Harry just gaped at Winky, mouthing *Crouch?* Hermione was no less astonished. Winky was Mr. Crouch's elf? *Percy Weasley's* boss, Mr. Crouch?

"Winky is having trouble adjusting, Harry Potter," squeaked Dobby confidentially. "Winky was freed very suddenly and unexpectedly."

"When? How?" asked Harry in hushed whisper.

"Dobby does not know, Harry Potter. But when Dobby went to visit Winky on Boxing Day last year, Winky was already free!"

" *Boxing day,* " Harry repeated, frowning deeply. Then, after giving a meaningful look at Hermione, he knelt down in front of the wailing Winky.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you," he said. "I'm sure you were a very good House-elf to Mr. Crouch. I met him this summer and he looked like he was missing you."

"You has seen my master?" said Winky breathlessly, raising her tearstained face out of her skirt once more and goggling at Harry. "You has seen my master where?"

"At the Quidditch World Cup. He looked like he was trying to do too much by himself."

Winky dissolved yet again in tears; they could hear her sobbing into her skirt, "Poor master, poor master, no Winky to help him no more!"

They couldn't get another sensible word out of Winky. So they left her to her crying and prepared to leave, as it was very late now. The elves pressed their usual snacks for them to take back upstairs. Hermione refused, but Harry filled his pockets.

"Thanks a lot! And good job not letting Peeves stop you from giving us a fantastic feast, everyone!" Harry said to the all elves that all clustered around the door to say good night. "See you, Dobby!"

"Harry Potter… can Dobby come and see you sometimes, sir?" Dobby asked tentatively.

" 'Course you can," said Harry, and Dobby beamed.

"You know, house-elves get a very raw deal!" said Hermione indignantly as they made their way to the Gryffindor Tower. "They're practically *brainwashed* to believing slavery is good! Why doesn't anyone do something about it?"

"Interesting question, but not very important right now," said Harry curtly. "Don't you see? Crouch freed Winky the day after someone rescued Pettigrew from the Ministry of Magic!"

Hermione stopped short.

" ' *An Important Ministry of Magic member, who shall remain anonymous, was put under the Imperius Curse at his residence and was used to reach the captured Peter Pettigrew*,'" she whispered, quoting the *Daily Prophet* article that reported Pettigrew's escape.

"This can't be a coincidence," said Harry, walking faster. "Mr. Crouch must've thought Winky was responsible for the attack somehow, otherwise he wouldn't have punished her. But the only way *Winky* could somehow be responsible for the attack is if Mr. Crouch was the 'Important Ministry Official' the *Daily Prophet* mentioned."

"Well it definitely sounds exactly like the sort thing that horrible Mr. Crouch would do!" said Hermione angrily. "Accusing Mr. Shin of running amok for not going strictly by the book… dismissing Winky on the spot for not keeping him from being Imperiused… as if a house-elf could stand a chance against a full-fledged dark wizard! I mean, she might have been stunned first!"

"Yes, it's all very iffy," Harry agreed. "But what I don't understand is: *why* ? Why was Winky responsible for the attack? Why dismiss Winky at all? I suppose Crouch could have ordered Winky to protect him from dark wizards, but why would he give that kind of order to his *house-elf* ? It doesn't make sense."

The question still lingered after Harry and Hermione went their separate ways inside the Gryffindor tower.

Final Notes : Arthur Weasley has a credit card. And you didn't think I'd forget about Winky did you?

The mystery begins…

Pregnant Waiting

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Forty Nine: Pregnant Waiting

The questions related to Bartemius Crouch sacking his house-elf Winky lingered in Harry's mind like the heavy clouds of pewter grey that remained swirling overhead the next morning after the storm blew itself off. He and his friends went downstairs to the Great Hall for breakfast. A few seats along the Gryffindor table, Fred, George, and Lee Jordan were discussing magical methods of aging themselves and bluffing their way into the Triwizard Tournament. They stopped their discussion when Professor McGonagall came over to hand out their new course schedules.

"Oh, Professor McGonagall, I wanted to ask you-" said Harry as he received his.

"Mr. Holmes wrote to me about your new sibling's upcoming birth, Potter," said Professor McGonagall. "Professor Dumbledore agreed you may visit during the weekends. Professor Lupin volunteered to act as chaperon."

Harry sighed in relief as he marvelled over Sherlock's unexpected bit of thoughtfulness. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, and congratulations," said Professor McGonagall,

smiling briefly.

Harry checked his schedule whilst munching on toast.

"Today's not bad; outside all morning," said Ron, who was running his finger down the Monday column of his own schedule. "Herbology with the Hufflepuffs and Care of Magical Creatures… damn it, we're still with the Slytherins."

"Study of Ancient Runes this afternoon," Harry groaned. The Study of Ancient Runes was the subject he found most boring and pointless, apart from History of Magic. Professor Babbling kept making them memorize words straight out of a Rune dictionary and translate short, incomprehensible sentences that were of no practical use.

"You should've just signed up for two courses like me," said Ron.

"It's really not that hard, Harry," said Hermione. "Once you memorise all the basic Runes and grammar, everything becomes easier."

"Yes, thank you," Harry groused, feeling extremely annoyed at the reoccurring advice that was of no help to him.

"I see they've messed up your timetable again," said Ron, looking over at Hermione's schedule. "Is there any point asking how you're managing it all?"

"No," said Hermione shortly.

"Why are you doing all this?" Ron pressed. "Are you planning on working for the Ministry like Percy?"

"Well I don't know yet, but I'd like to keep all my options open."

"What if you end up needing Divinations?"

"I seriously doubt I'd want to work for something that requires *Divinations*," said Hermione haughtily.

"But what if-"

"Oh, Ron, what's it to you if my timetable's a bit full?" Hermione snapped. "I've fixed it all with Professor McGonagall and I've gone to all my classes without any problems last year. Isn't that enough?"

"But that's *all* you did last year: working and going to class," said Ron, but very quietly.

After breakfast, Harry, Ron, Neville and Hermione set off to the lawns, trudged past the sodden vegetable patch and arrived in greenhouse three for Herbology. There Professor Sprout introduced them to a plant Harry, Ron and Hermione had read about, having come across it in a book when they were first years looking up scar removing potions for John, but hadn't actually seen: Bubotubers.

Bubotubers had to be the ugliest plants Harry had ever seen. Indeed, they looked less like plants than thick, black, giant slugs, protruding vertically out of the soil. Each was squirming slightly and had a number of large, shiny swellings that appeared to be full of liquid. The Gryffindors and the Hufflepuffs spent the next hour squeezing the plants and collecting the pus, which was a thick yellowish-green liquid that smelled strongly of petrol. By the end of class, they'd collected several pints worth in glass bottles.

"No wonder people avoid even the diluted solution of this for pimples," Ron said, looking revolted as he squeezed the last Bubotuber with his dragon-hide gloved hands.

"I see you've read ahead, Weasley. Very good," said Professor Sprout, stoppering a bottle with a cork. "Bubotuber pus is an excellent remedy for the more stubborn forms of acne. This batch should stop students resorting to desperate measures to rid themselves of pimples."

"Like poor Eloise Midgen," said Hannah Abbott, a Hufflepuff, in a hushed voice. "She tried to curse hers off."

"Silly girl," said Professor Sprout, shaking her head. "But Madam Pomfrey fixed her nose back on in the end."

A booming bell echoed from the castle across the wet grounds, signalling the end of the lesson. The class separated; the Hufflepuffs

climbing the stone steps for Transfiguration, and the Gryffindors heading in the other direction, down the sloping lawn toward Hagrid's small wooden cabin, which stood on the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

"Wonder what we're going to handle this time," said Harry, eyeing the crates behind Hagrid's hut warily.

"Hopefully not the Clabberts again," said Neville, looking fearful. They'd paid their first trip to the Forbidden Forest last year in search of the creatures, which looked like a hairless cross between a monkey and a frog, and a large pustule in the middle of its forehead. The Clabberts themselves were quite harmless, but the creatures they met *besides* the Clabberts left several of their classmates, Malfoy in particular, extremely traumatized.

"Maybe he brought in a baby Yeti?" Ron wondered, looking furtively around.

"Don't give him ideas," hissed Hermione

They heard the giant, squelchy footsteps that could only belong to one person.

"Mornin'!" Hagrid said, grinning. "Be'er wait fer the Slytherins. We're studyin' Bowtruckles terday!"

"That's not too bad," said Harry. "Bowtruckles are rated XX."

"Oh, Harry, *think!* " said Hermione, bunching up her bushy hair in both fists. "Do you see any logs or trees around here where they could be living in? That means…"

"… The Forbidden Forest," Harry, Ron and Neville groaned together.

"Righ' yeh are," said Hagrid happily. "If we find them Bowtruckles early, we migh' get a chance ter work on a speci'l project I've bin workin' on-Blast-ended Skrewts!"

"Do we even want to know?" muttered Seamus.

"I *refuse*," said a cold voice.

The Slytherins had arrived. The speaker was Draco Malfoy, and he was trying to hide his fear without much success.

"I refuse to go into that godforsaken place again for *wood sprits*," Malfoy spat. "My father will never stand for it. Bring them over here if you want to teach us about them."

The Slytherins murmured in agreement. Harry and his fellow Gryffindors refused to agree on principle.

"You're going to do what you're told, boy!" barked Professor Kettleburn, pointing a digit on his clamp at Malfoy as he marched unevenly towards them. "What's the use of studying a Bowtruckle in a cage?! If you're going to study wild magical creatures, you study them as close to their natural habitat as you can!"

"I wouldn't mind studying them in captivity first," Ron murmured into Harry's ear.

But there was no avoiding a trip. It was either the Forbidden Forest or whatever creature Hagrid was working on. Hagrid simply loved monstrous creatures, the more lethal the better, and if the gamekeeper/Assistant Professor for Care of Magical Creatures was excited to share a creature in the centre of his 'special project', the particular creature's lethalness was probably off the charts. At least the Forbidden Forest had creatures they could *recognise.*

The trip to the Forbidden Forest was the typical debacle. Hagrid managed to find a tree several Bowtruckles had made home in after twenty minutes of walking. Malfoy almost got his eyes gouged out by the aforementioned Bowtruckles when Professor Kettleburn ordered the class to offer them woodlice so they could draw nearer. Then Hagrid had to save Professor Kettleburn from the giant vine plant that partially digested him just after they'd saved Malfoy from certain blindness. On their way back, they had an encounter with a Forest Troll, who took a great liking to Gregory Goyle and tried to kidnap him.

Then they met the skrewts.

It was as they feared. The Blast-Ended Skrewts looked like deformed, shell-less lobsters, horribly pale and slimy-looking, with legs sticking out in very odd places and no visible heads. There were about a hundred of them in the crates Hagrid showed to the class, each about six inches long, crawling over one another, bumping blindly into the sides of the boxes. They gave off a very powerful smell of rotting fish, and every now and then, sparks would fly out of the end of a skrewt, and with a small *phut*, it would be propelled forward several inches. Hagrid was suggesting they find out what they ate, waving a hand over a barrel full of grass snakes, frog liver and ant eggs, when the bell rang.

"Well, at least the skrewts are small," said Ron as they made their way back up to the castle for lunch.

"They are *now*," said Hermione in an exasperated voice, "but once Hagrid's found out what they eat, I expect they'll be six feet long."

"Why is he even raising them?" Neville wondered as he massaged the burn on the back of his hand (one of the Skrewts had exploded on him when he got too close). "D'you think it's for the Triwizard Tournament?"

"If it is, I'm glad we're not competing," Harry declared. "I don't ever want to face something that's six feet long and can burn, sting, and bite all at once."

Ron, Neville and Hermione nodded fervently in agreement.

They sat down at the Gryffindor table and helped themselves to lamb chops and potatoes. Julia came over from the Great Hall's entrance and joined them at their table.

"Uncle Jeremy wants to talk to you," said Julia to Ron. "When are you free?"

"Dunno. All depends on how much homework Professor Burbage gives us," said Ron.

"Do you have any clue what's in store?" asked Harry.

"No. Auntie Jack isn't helping Professor Burbage this year."

"Why not?" asked both Harry and Ron, equally disappointed at the news. Miss Jackie's Muggle Study classes were always more interesting than Professor Burbage's and she rarely gave out homework.

"She *says* she's trying not to work too much," Julia replied. "I think she's actually serious about it; she even quit her engineering job."

Harry, Ron, Neville and Hermione stared in disbelief.

"First she cancels a lesson, now she's quitting two of her jobs?" said Harry in astonishment. "What's going on?"

"Maybe she turned a new leaf?" said Hermione. "I mean, we've always worried she'd work herself to death…"

Julia laughed hollowly. "Only Auntie Jack."

"Do you know why?"

"I think I do, but until I see it myself, I'm in denial," Julia declared.

Harry thought this sounded very familiar. "Why don't you ask?"

"I don't want to."

"C'mon, don't you want to know?" said Ron.

Julia glared at him.

"Can you ask your mother who she first kissed? Would you ask her if she ever went up a secret nook after curfew with your dad when they were students?" Ron blanched. "See, you *don't* ."

"What you just said wouldn't have some relation to your suspicions, would it?" said Harry shrewdly.

Julia cringed. " *No* . Nononono, we're not going to talk about this!"

"Fine. Meet you at the music classroom after dinner?"

"Sure, midget."

"Thank you, brainy specs."

"You're welcome, fatally myopic geek," Julia retorted. "I have to go. See you."

She went away, shouldering her bulging white tote.

"What?" Harry said, when he noticed Ron was smirking.

" *Well*…" said Ron. "It seemed like you were-"

Harry decided then and there he categorically and absolutely didn't want this to continue.

"I've got a case to solve and it's big," he said loudly.

"What, already?" said Ron, completely derailed, just as Harry hoped.

"I'll tell you after Ancient Runes. I've got some thinking to do," said Harry. Then he helped himself to more lamb chops.

Harry told Neville, Ron and Julia all about Winky over dinner as promised. It took a bit of explaining to make them (Ron particularly) appreciate the seriousness of the matter.

"So Crouch sacked Winky; what's the big deal?" Ron asked.

"The problem is *Pettigrew*," said Harry. "Where is he? What is he up to? The whole Wizarding world is after him, but he hasn't been found. Also, who helped him escape? The person who attacked Crouch was probably the person who rescued Pettigrew. But how did this person know so quickly? And why did the perp bother to help Pettigrew?"

"Why wouldn't he? Aren't they both You-Know-Who supporters?" said Ron.

"Because Pettigrew is half-responsible for You-Know-Who's downfall!" piped Neville. Then he gaped, apparently shocked at his own insight.

Ron and Hermione were astonished, too.

"Oh. Right," said Ron, blinking.

"Exactly," said Harry, nodding in approval. "Pettigrew is the last person a loyal LV supporter would want to help. If anything, they'd want to kill him as revenge. Pettigrew knew that, too, so he hid himself as a rat for twelve years. But the perp didn't kill him. Meaning: the perp needed Pettigrew alive. Why? I can think of only one reason: Pettigrew is somehow necessary to LV's return."

Hermione, Ron and Neville paled.

"So how exactly does Winky enter into this?" Ron asked.

"Winky was Crouch's house-elf, so she must have been there at his home when the attack happened," said Hermione at once. "Mr. Weasley said Grandmaster Shin told Mr. Crouch about Pettigrew the day he found him as a courtesy because Crouch was the old Head of Law Enforcement, and the one who sent Sirius to Azkaban without a trial. That same evening, Crouch was attacked at his home. The only way the perp could've heard about Pettigrew, then, is *if he or she was already in Crouch's house!* "

"And the only *sensible* reason why Crouch would sack Winky is if Winky was somehow responsible for this person's presence," said Julia, frowning thoughtfully, while Ron and Neville stared at the girls with stupefied faces.

"My thoughts exactly," said Harry, nodding. "But here is where things get confusing. Why would Crouch let someone who is a loyal LV supporter in his *house?* It doesn't fit the man who yelled at Julia's granddad for not understanding him after he worked tiredly against the Dark Arts for decades, as 'everyone knows'."

"He's all about rules and regulations, too," said Julia. "Remember that time Crouch asked Ron's dad about Ali Bashir and Britain's embargo on flying carpets?"

"Yeah, he mentioned his grandfather had one that could seat twelve," said Hermione.

"An Axminster, but that was before, I quote, carpets were banned," said Julia. "He sounded like he wanted to make sure everyone knew his family lives strictly according to the law. He takes pride in it, that much is obvious. So why is such a person harboring a loyal LV supporter in his house on Christmas when by law he should be working to arrest this person?"

"Probably not for a Christmas party," muttered Ron. "Fun and Crouch are mutually exclusive."

"Does he have family?" asked Neville.

"I seriously doubt someone would want to marry Crouch. Can you imagine *living* with him?" Hermione sniffed.

"Well, Percy dated Penelope Clearwater, so I guess there are *some* girls who dig that," said Ron. "Mind, they aren't seeing each other anymore, not since Percy started working. At the rate he's going, Percy's going to *marry* his job. I wouldn't be surprised if that's what happened to Crouch."

"Let's make sure he's a bachelor before we make any assumptions," said Julia sensibly. "Ron can ask his dad and I can ask grandpa."

"Good point," said Ron. "I reckon my dad knows. I'll ask him."

Neville, who had his mouth open as though he had something to say, shut his mouth and looked down. As Harry wondered about this, Hermione checked her watch.

"It's almost six," she said. "You should go to the Music Room now, Harry and Julia, if you want to see Miss Jackie today. Ron, you have Muggle Studies homework to start."

"Thanks for the reminder," Ron groaned. "Damn Burbage; it'll take all weekend, it will…"

"That's why you should start *early*," Hermione lectured. "C'mon, Professor Vector didn't give us any, so I can help…"

Harry and Julia got up. As the two of them left the Great Hall together, Harry heard Neville ask timidly:

"Hermione? D'you think you can help me fill out my horoscope?"

Two more days passed. As far as Ron's fellow fourth year Gryffindors like Seamus and Dean were concerned, those days passed without great incident, unless one counted Neville melting his sixth cauldron in Potions. Snape, who appeared to have attained new levels of vindictiveness over the summer, gave Neville detention, and Neville returned from it in a state of nervous collapse, having been made to disembowel a barrel full of horned toads.

"You know why Snape's in such a foul mood, don't you?" said Ron to Harry as they watched Hermione teaching Neville a Scouring Charm to remove the guts from under his fingernails.

"Yeah," growled Harry, smouldering in rage. " *Me* ."

Harry had told them John and Sherlock threatened to talk to the Press if Snape kept his campaign of singling out Harry for bullying. Ron didn't think Snape could possibly make pot shots at Harry with that hovering over his head, but he was wrong. He was so, very wrong.

"There have been some complaints about this class," Snape began, sounding as though he was chewing on a handful of nails. "So to ensure even the greatest dullard among you doesn't bring the entire class down to his level, I will *personally* ensure that that person does not fail."

He was looking at Neville, but it was obvious he was really referring to Harry, who was sharing his workbench.

Class proceeded after the short announcement. Snape lectured them on antidotes, hinting heavily that he was going to *thoroughly* test their solutions (meaning he was going to poison one of them), and then he set them to concoct a remedy for common Potion overdoses. Snape did his usual sweeping around, but instead of criticizing everyone but Malfoy as he usually did, he concentrated on poor Neville.

"Longbottom!" Snape barked, making Neville let go of his knife. "Did I not state clearly, the burdock roots should be sliced on the bias? Did I not write, quite clearly, the slices must be an eighth of an inch? Were you paying attention at all? Did you think you could get away without listening after the ineptitude you've shown thus far?"

The Slytherins chuckled appreciatively. Trembling, Neville picked up his knife again and started to cut the roots on bias, which he *was* doing, Ron furiously noted.

"I said *slice*, not *mangle*, idiot boy!" shouted Snape again, making Neville jump.

"You need to hone your knife," muttered Harry from the corner of his mouth as Snape walked away. "Here, use my…"

Snape suddenly turned heel and marched over to Harry and Neville's workbench. Slowly, he bent down and planted his ugly mug inches away from Neville's pale and sweaty face.

" *When*," he hissed softly, "have I said you can receive help, Longbottom? If I catch you doing something I haven't given you express permission to do, you will regret you've ever lived."

Harry turned white at that.

The rest of class went on in the same vein. To no one's surprise, Neville flubbed his Potion miserably, the tears he tried to wipe away discreetly causing the aforementioned cauldron meltdown. Harry was biting his lip so hard when Snape gave Neville detention, he was bleeding.

"He was doing it on purpose!" Harry raged. "I can't take this! Snape has no business taking it out on you! I'll ask John to-"

"No," said Neville shakily. "It's not your fault Snape is… is like *that* . You shouldn't give in. I can deal with this."

"You shouldn't have to!" said Harry furiously. "Snape of all people should know better! You know what, I'm *done* ! I'm not taking his crap anymore! I don't care how badly he was bullied as a kid, if this is how he's doing to react, I'm taking him down!"

"But how?" asked Hermione, looking thoroughly alarmed. "You-you're not going to attack him, are you? Harry, he's still a teacher!"

"I'll think of something," Harry fumed. "And see if I care."

Then he stormed off to the boys' dormitory, leaving Ron feeling sorry for Snape in spite of himself.

Harry's boiling anger died down to a simmer the following morning, but his mood seemed to have taken a brooding turn. Ron learned to dread these brooding periods, as they tended to linger far longer than Harry's outbursts of rage.

"You know why he's so tense, don't you," said Hermione quietly over breakfast.

"Uh, no?" said Ron.

" *Benedict*," whispered Hermione reproachfully. "John was supposed to give birth yesterday. He's *late* ."

Ron couldn't believe he forgot about that.

" *Oh…"* he said.

Harry remained terse and uncommunicative during their morning classes. Julia alone knew how to console him, being an older sister to four much younger siblings.

"Ellen told me John told her Benedict started descending last week," said Julia over lunch. "That means he's getting ready to come out."

"Isn't it late, descending at 39 weeks?" asked Harry, who barely ate anything since breakfast.

"Every baby is different," said Julia calmly. "I dropped at 37 weeks and Martin dropped the day before he was born. Anyway, John was clear for all the checkups, right? No gestational diabetes or anything?"

"Besides throwing up after taking The Drink, no, I don't think so…"

"They sound like two pregnant women," muttered Ron, which earned him a glare from Hermione.

The fourth year Gryffindors had Defence Against the Dark Arts after lunch. It was the favourite class of many thanks to the teacher, Professor Remus Lupin. He was easily the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher they'd ever had, and the first person to survive his first year of teaching the subject in many years. His only flaw, if one could call it that, was as a werewolf, he had to take monthly absences because of the full moon.

Ron noticed there were more greys in Professor Lupin's hair as he walked in, and that he appeared wearier than last year around this time. He still smiled at them, though, the corner of his eyes creasing with more lines than Ron remembered there being.

"It's good to see you all again," he said pleasantly. "You can put your books back into your bags. You won't need them today."

Everyone put their books away eagerly. The last time Lupin asked them to, he'd led the memorable Boggart lesson.

"Last year we've covered dark creatures," said Professor Lupin when everyone was ready. "I believe everyone now has a very good grasp on how to tackle boggarts, Red Caps, hinkypunks, grindylows, Kappas, and werewolves."

There was a general murmur of agreement. Lupin beamed proudly at them all.

"This year, we're going to focus on curses," said Lupin. "As you may know, curses come in many strengths and forms. According to the Ministry of Magic, I'm supposed to teach you only counter-curses and let sixth years and above start tackling actual curses. Professor Dumbledore, however, has a better opinion of your nerves and believes you are ready to cope. I myself think it is better to be prepared, as it is highly unlikely your opponent is going to politely tell you what he or she is going to do before casting an illegal spell on you."

Ron and Harry shared a grin.

"Now, teaching curses is a bit tricky," said Lupin, twinkling. "Can someone tell me why?"

Hermione's hand went up immediately.

"There are a large variety of them, with new curses developing every day," she answered promptly.

"I couldn't have put it better. Thank you, Hermione, take ten points to Gryffindor," said Lupin, and Hermione glowed. "Some curses go out of fashion, only to pop up again several years later. Those who are talented in spell-creation improve existing ones. Trying to learn about them all, then, becomes a rather impossible task. What do you think we should do, then, Harry?"

Harry blinked a couple of times.

"Er… find a simple spell that lets you block all the weaker ones and deal with the stronger curses separately?"

"Precisely; take another ten points," said Professor Lupin. "It's always best to avoid a curse than trying to lift one after it hits you. There are plenty of curses that prevent the victim from using magic, which would make your ability to cast the countercurse quite useless.

"The spell we're going to learn today is the Shield Charm. The incantation is *Protego* ."

" *Protego*," said the class together.

"Good," said Professor Lupin, "Very good. But that was the easy part, I'm afraid. The shield charm is a more advanced spell than the ones you've learned so far, and plenty of witches and wizards have trouble with it. So today we'll practice casting in pairs. Each person will attempt the shield charm and try to shatter their partner's shield with any charm or curse that, *ahem*, he or she happens to know."

Everyone paired up. Hermione, of course, was the first one to cast the shield charm successfully, but Harry's shield was the most

durable. Curses just bounced off of the sphere of light that surrounded him like an unbreakable glass ball, making them ricochet off walls and shatter other people's shields. Lupin went down the line and coached the pairs, giving pointers and encouragements. Ron managed to get one up half-way into the lesson, only to have Hermione shatter it with a well-placed jelly-legs jinx. Ron wobbled all around the floor until Lupin came over and performed the countercurse.

"Excellent!" said Lupin at the end of the class, by which time everyone was able to cast the shield charm at least once. "We're making a very good start! We'll continue to practice our shield charms until everyone is able to block a spell. Let's see, for homework, please write a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the shield charm and give at least two examples each of curses that the shield charm can and cannot block. That is all!"

"That was exhilarating!" said Seamus as they left the classroom. "*This* is what I'd always imagined Defence Against the Dark Arts being-battles and duels!"

"Did you see my shield block Ron's tickle charm?" said Dean excitedly.

"I shattered it later with the Furnunculus curse," Ron shot back.

"I broke yours *twice* with the slug-vomiting hex!"

"It was so *scary*," Parvati said to Lavender. "I wish we did it one by one like last year."

Ron felt his robe sleeve tugged at. He turned around and found Hermione. Harry was absent.

"Where'd he go?"

"Professor Lupin wanted to have a word with him," said Hermione as she pulled him back towards the classroom

They waited for Harry out at the hall. Harry joined them in a minute. He looked dazed.

"I have to get ready to leave any time starting now," he said. "John's getting ready for labour."

Harry's fretful waiting reached a fever pitch by the weekend. He spent Friday without bothering to wear his school robes, attending all his classes in Muggle attire. He also kept checking his phone compulsively, and could barely pay attention to the conversations that were going around him. Hermione thought Fred and George were going about the worst way to lighten him up. They kept making false birth announcements until Ginny, furious at their thoughtless antics, cast the Bat-Bogey hex at them. The resulting bogey bats chased her twin-brothers right out of the common room and into the hall outside.

"If he's this bad with a little brother, I don't know how he's going to cope when he has his own kid," said Ron as Saturday waned.

The real announcement came Sunday afternoon, around lunch time. Professor McGonagall and Professor Lupin came over to the Gryffindor table just after Harry's phone pinged.

"It's time, Potter," said Professor McGonagall briskly. "Please follow after Professor Lupin."

"Oh. Right," said Harry, dropping his fork.

Harry sent intermittent texts updating them what was going on after he left:

Doctor said John needs to be 10cm dilated. Made the mistake of asking how big that is. I can never look at bagels now.

All the extended Holmes family is in the hospital. Mycroft was surprised even the Russian branch of the family came when cousins Vasily and Vitaly arrived from St. Petersburg.

I think half of them know I'm a wizard but they're not saying. I have no clue what gave me away.

Never mind, it was your mum and dad, Ron.

Sirius, Mr. Lestrade and Mycroft are betting when John will start swearing. Sherlock told John not to swear. John threw a tray at him.

Mr. Lestrade won the bet. Sherlock pleased Mycroft didn't win.

There was a very long pause between that and the next volley of texts.

B taking his time. John is very sweary because, never mind the pain, you can't eat during labour (didn't know that).

Didn't know women can push so hard the small blood vessels on their faces bursts.

Didn't know there can be enough blood to splatter everyone either. I've never seen so much blood.

Hermione had to stop reading at this point because she was feeling queasy.

It was two in morning when the long awaited text came:

Jeremy Benedict BORN! Whopping 9 pounds and 2 ounces!

John says Holmeses must secretly be gingers because Benedict has strawberry blonde hair and this can only happen if both parent families have the red-hair gene.

Final Notes : writing Snape is becoming more and more painful. The man is a ball of anger, malice and hurt, I tell you. Harry's OOTP rage abounds a year early. Jeremy Benedict is finally born. *Phew* .

The Madman Returns

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty: The Madman Returns

Severus was in the staffroom when Ms. Jacqueline Shin announced Watson had successfully delivered a healthy baby boy. The news was met with much celebration and relief, as Potter had been fretting worse than a father awaiting the arrival of his first child the week leading to the birth and the teachers were informed why when Ms. Shin mentioned in passing Watson was having a 'high risk' pregnancy due to age and previous war injuries (and Merlin forbid Potter lose a mother a *third* time).

"So how is Dr. Watson?" asked McGonagall.

"She's recovering well; just waiting to get discharged from the hospital," said Ms. Shin.

"Were there complications?" asked Pomfrey, turning concerned.

"Oh, no. Just some second degree tearing and-"

The staff drew a collective gasp of alarm. Then Flitwick burst into tears, Hagrid jumped to his feet and started dancing uncertainly on his spot, and Pomfrey demanded to know tearing in *where* . Ms. Shin tried to placate them.

"It's not uncommon for Muggle women to experience tearing around the, uh… *during labour*, especially when the baby is larger than average," she said. "The doctor applied the usual stitches-"

" *Stitches* ?" asked several teachers at once, sounding equal portions bewildered and appalled.

"It's a well-established Muggle medical practice that uses thread and needles to, um, close open wounds," said Ms. Shin in a shrinking voice.

The staff started panicking in earnest. Flitwick wailed Dr. Watson must receive *proper* treatment immediately, Pomfrey wondered if she could make it to London in time and Ms. Shin tried, and failed, to restore calm as she explained stitching was a perfectly safe procedure when done under the sanitized conditions of a Muggle hospital and the expertise of a doctor-and *no*, the threads didn't stay there for life, it dissolved on their own in a few days.

Severus left the staffroom in the midst of the hubbub.

He quickly made his way to the Dungeons and into his private quarters. There he called Watson. As he anxiously waited for the call to connect, it occurred to Severus Watson may refuse pick up the phone. Muggle mobile phones had the ability to identify the name of the caller; therefore it was perfectly within the realm of probability Watson would look at the name Severus Snape- *Persona Non Grata* -and let the phone ring off.

The call connected.

"Hey, Snape," said Watson's tired voice.

Severus let go the breath he was holding. "Ms. Shin told us the news," he said, more tersely than he'd intended.

"Already?" said Watson bemusedly. The utter lack of worry infuriated Severus somehow.

"She mentioned *tearing*," Severus snapped. "The Muggle remedy she said you received didn't inspire confidence."

"You sound like Molly Weasley," Watson grumbled. "Relax. Jason cast the *Episkey* spell to spare me the trouble of recovering in weeks. Did I mention maternal death via stitches is virtually zero?"

"But the blood loss?"

"Not enough to die from." Watson yawned. "Sorry, I'm dead tired and everything hurts."

"I thought the pain ended with the labour."

"That's utter shite. The pain can linger up to a *month*," Watson yawned again. "Molly said I can't take potions for this because it can wind up in the breast milk, and that's not good for the baby."

Severus shut his mouth; he had been about to suggest some Potions that could address the pain.

"Perineum tearing not a common thing to witches, I take it," Watson remarked.

"Healers use stretching spells to ease the birthing process."

"That sounds nice. And you guys probably don't use oxytocin to induce labour either."

"What are you talking about?" said Severus crossly.

"Mummy things," Watson teased amiably, before making low rustling noises. "Here, you should take a look at Jamie before I fall asleep. I'm known to do it out of the blue. Switch to MMN."

"Jamie?" said Severus as he did so.

"A nickname that sprung up after saying JB too many times; Sherlock naturally hates it," said Watson as more rustling sounds filtered through the MMN phone.

The image that eventually projected out of Severus' MMN phone was an infant swaddled in white cloth. The lines of his shut and swollen eyes, tiny cupid-bow upper lip and button nose were the only distinguishing features on the baby's pink and chubby face.

"I can't tell who he looks like," said Watson fondly. "But he definitely got Sherlock's mouth."

"I sincerely hope this isn't a sign he will develop his father's silver tongue as well."

"Oh, G-d, don't say that," groaned Watson. "Either way I'm planning to teach him to speak truth with *love*, dammit."

Severus snorted. Then they stewed in a comfortable sort of silence.

"Never thought I'd be a mother to a baby," said Watson softly, as she gently caressed the infant's invisible brow. "Have I thanked you for making it happen?"

Severus looked away, feeling deeply uncomfortable and awkward. "Mmnm," he grunted.

"Well…" Watson began.

A blonde-haired head suddenly appeared and landed with a loud *thunk* on the cot where the baby laid. As Severus stared, alarmed, the infant twitched, screwed up his face, and then started to cry in series of short, ear-splitting screeches. The blonde head didn't move despite the racket.

Severus was trying to think of what to do, when he heard a noisy clatter of footsteps approaching. Soon a pair of large hands snatched the baby away from the cot.

Severus was about to end the call when the projection shifted from the cot to Sherlock Holmes. The image showed him Holmes cradling the infant against his chest whilst holding Watson's MMN phone at arms' length (he could see the extended arm). There was a brittle air about Holmes that Severus had never seen before.

For a while the two of them just stared at each other as the baby cried into Holmes's chest.

"… *Snape*," said Holmes in a low voice.

"Holmes," Severus returned likewise.

There was another tense pause. What was he supposed to do? Severus wondered. How did one talk to a man who essentially threatened to ruin you if he didn't back off on his other child?

"I didn't think you'd extend your reign of terror to infants," said Holmes, frowning slightly.

Severus saw red.

"That comment alone confirms my suspicion your reputation of genius is overblown!" Severus snarled. "Don't you see your wife is lying unconscious? Are you so *blind* that you can't tell there is something hideously wrong!?"

"SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS DOESN'T SUIT YOU, SNAPE!" roared Holmes, his face twisting into an ugly look. "AND IT IS *YOU* WHO IS BLIND! DID YOU THINK I WOULDN'T KNOW YOU'RE USING NEVILLE AS A WHIPPING BOY? DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD GET AWAY WITH MERELY FOLLOWING THE LETTER OF THE LAW AND NOT THE SPIRIT? YOUR DELUSIONS OF MASTERY DISGUSTS ME!"

Severus was so furious he couldn't breathe. As his ears rang with the pitiful screams of an infant, Severus vowed he was going to *kill* Holmes; he was really going to…

The projection vanished before Severus could say or do anything. Enraged beyond reason, Severus threw his phone at one of his storage shelves. It shattered several glass containers before hitting the ground, and the contents spilled all over the floor with its preserving liquid.

"Dammit," hissed Severus as he glared at the wreckage. " *Damn it*…"

John woke up with a start. In the moment of disorientation that followed, John wondered why there was a crying baby in the room. It actually took a few seconds for John to realise the baby was *hers* .

"Yes, you've fallen asleep. Again," said Sherlock, who attempting to

console JB/Jamie without much success.

John dropped her face into the cot's mattress again. "I'm a terrible mother."

"Stop speaking such blatant absurdities. I've been told it takes *days* for the presence of new child to really sink in."

"Who told you that?" said John as she reached out for JB/Jamie.

Sherlock carefully deposited him into John's arms. Even after the transfer, Jamie kept crying in short, high-pitched blasts.

"I think he's hungry," John guessed. "Hand over one of the bottles."

JB/Jamie stopped crying immediately when John stuffed a bottle into his mouth.

"At least he doesn't mind the bottle, though it's probably too early to tell," John remarked.

"Considering he'll spend much of his time with nannies, he better get used to it," said Sherlock as he pulled up a chair.

" *What* ?!" said John, outraged. "Who said anything about-"

"Don't presume my intentions," Sherlock interrupted. "John, I believe it is high time we got to the root of your unfortunate habit have collapsing to asleep. If incidents like these continue in the immediate future, you can't say it won't happen while you're holding Jeremy."

John went still. John and Sherlock then spent several heartbeats just staring at each other while JB obliviously suckled on his bottle.

"… You're right. I might drop him," said John, looking down.

"Of course I'm right."

"Not encouraging."

"It wasn't meant to be," said Sherlock quietly. "At the very least, we need someone who can monitor your sleeping patterns. I can't be

the person."

"No," John agreed. The constant surveillance required was far beyond Sherlock's capacity to do, and John knew the realities of long-term medical care too well to hold it against him .

"Mycroft gave me a list of candidates," said Sherlock, his face crinkling in disgust.

"Vetted and screened them all months in advance, didn't he?" said John, remembering the fateful meeting inside an abandoned warehouse; the hazards/privileges of having the British Government as a brother-in-law. "I have a feeling they're going to hate their life in a week."

"We are difficult people to live with."

"And a baby would only make things worse," John sighed deeply. "I wish we had a house-elf."

Sherlock considered the idea with great interest. "Perhaps Dumbledore could spare us one."

"Aren't they bound to the castle?"

"But if there is an elf that is *not* magically bound to a particular residence…"

"Oh, c'mon, what are the chances of that…"

"… You have *two* free elves?" John exclaimed.

"Yes, Dobby and Winky," said Dumbledore to the holographic image of John and Sherlock. "Dobby is very fond of Harry, so I expect he will be more than happy to spend some of his working hours helping you. As for Winky, I believe once she gets used to her status as a free elf, she will delight in the idea of caring for a baby."

"That would be great," said John fervently. "So, how are we supposed to pay them? Not clothes, obviously-"

"Winky would be greatly offended if you tried to pay her in any formal way. As for Dobby, I believe he actually *delights* in clothes, particularly socks."

John looked startled, but Sherlock looked intrigued. "What about cream or honey?" the latter asked.

"The honey would not go unappreciated."

"Honey it is," said Sherlock, nodding.

"You're going to start urban beekeeping, aren't you?" John groaned.

"Of course," said Sherlock, eyes gleaming. "No time like the present."

John groaned again. "Mrs. Hudson's going to evict us."

"No, she won't," said Sherlock confidently before hefting up a swaddled infant. "Behold, our son."

Dumbledore beamed at Jeremy Benedict, and Jeremy Benedict frowned in return.

"He hasn't figured out smiling yet," said John.

"He is very alert," said Dumbledore as Jeremy Benedict continued to scowl at him.

"Yes, and he likes *staying* alert," John sighed. "It doesn't bode well for us."

"June Hu here asks me to ask you if he is a vigorous eater with a preference for his mother's milk."

"Dr. Shin is with you?" said John, looking mildly intrigued. "Can you tell him: yes on both accounts?"

"Certainly," Dumbledore turned his beaming face at the glowering Shin. "Yes, on both accounts."

"You're not funny," Shin growled.

"Then I must increase my endeavours to be more so," said Dumbledore before turning to John and Sherlock again. "It's good to see you three are well."

"Thank you," John replied as Jeremy Benedict started to screw up his face in displeasure. "We better go. Oh, can you tell Snape I'm sorry for ending the call in the middle? I'd do it myself, but he's not picking up. You know how he's like when he's like that."

"I will. And good-bye, John."

The holographic image vanished as Jeremy Benedict started wailing.

"I'm going to miss their meddling," said Dumbledore as he put his phone away.

"That is a half-truth," said Shin, who was sitting across Dumbledore at the headmaster's desk. "You will certainly miss Sherlock's insight, especially now. You are, however, relieved the newborn's arrival would naturally lead to their less involvement in the wizarding world, which is turning increasingly hostile to people like them."

"Have I mentioned how much I appreciate your ability to discern my deepest thoughts?"

"No, because the appreciation is a half-lie; you prefer to keep your thoughts to yourself, but you are wise enough to know sharing them is a better course of action."

"Your frankness is also much appreciated," said Dumbledore, "By the by, why did you want to ask John if Benedict is a vigorous eater?"

"All the children I had, with the exception of Jacqueline, were vigorous eaters," Shin explained. "They suckled so hard they literally left their mothers bleeding and raw. I devised a paper charm that accelerates healing."

"So you had thought to gift it to John."

"They are often much appreciated by new mothers," Shin frowned

Dumbledore. "What?"

"Nothing," said Dumbledore, smiling fondly at Shin, "Merely amused that you actually sat down and devised such a humble paper charm when paper charms are primarily and traditionally used as weapons in magical warfare."

Shin grunted as he looked away. "It did not make much sense to me that I could destroy soul wands and uproot mountains, but could not alleviate my wife's pain."

"You loved them very much."

"I'm not a very lovable person. Loving them was the least I could do."

Dumbledore opened his mouth briefly, but shut his mouth again. Shin, who was still looking away, didn't know this.

"Returning to our previous subject: Greg and I searched the abandoned manor house in Little Hangleton you told us about," said Shin. "Someone has definitely stayed there recently."

"The evidence?"

"There were multiple footprints on the dusty floors, food eaten and discarded, and traces of new ash in the upper story fireplace."

"But the actual persons who resided there?"

"Not found."

"Alas," said Dumbledore, shaking his head.

"I left a few sentries in the house, but I doubt they'd return," said Shin. "The Muggle investigation into Frank Bryce's death is going nowhere, but I have little doubt he was murdered by the killing curse. Greg alerted Amelia Bones and I expect the law enforcement will soon look into the matter."

"Excellent."

"So have you learned anything about Jacqueline's…" Shin waved a hand, as though saying 'boyfriend' or 'beau' aloud was too painful to bear.

"He has not showed himself in Hogwarts," said Dumbledore calmly. "I have, however, spied Jacqueline burning several articles of adult male clothing in a fire. The clothes made me suspect a certain person as the candidate, but the idea was so ludicrous, I had to reconsider…"

Harry greeted the third week of October feeling glum, lonely and discouraged. He desperately wanted to talk to John, but John was in a constant state of insomnia-induced exhaustion/delirium because of Benedict, and Harry couldn't bear the thought of giving her more things to worry about.

"All parents of newborn babies go through this," said John tiredly the first time Harry visited 221B after Benedict was born. "For the first ten weeks or so, you don't dictate a baby's schedule. They dictate *yours* . And no, not even wizards feed their babies sleeping potions when they're this young."

Harry, who *had* been contemplating sleeping drafts, kept his mouth shut.

Things had only become more difficult in 221B since then. Much to Sherlock's apparent consternation, Benedict stubbornly rejected all forms of bottle and formula, and would only eat the good stuff directly from the source. Thus John's days largely consisted of sleeping 2-3 hour stretches when Benedict napped, rolling over to the co-sleeper to nurse Benedict when he woke up, change his nappy and entertain him until he fell asleep again. It was a good thing Dobby volunteered to take care of 221B's housework, because Harry had no idea how Sherlock and Mrs. Hudson would've coped on their own. Mrs. Hudson's hip had taken a turn for the worse lately, thus limiting her range of movement. One couldn't discuss Sherlock's ability as housekeeper because it didn't exist (his ability to accurately interpret the subtle nuances of Benedict's cries, however, was extremely helpful).

Luckily, John and Sherlock had no shortage of people who wanted to help. Besides Dobby there was Sirius, who loved entertaining Benedict and kept conjuring things for him to play with, even though he was too young to grasp anything. Mrs. Weasley had also taken upon herself to visit at least once a day and help where she could.

"Don't worry about it, dear," said Mrs. Weasley when John thanked her profusely for braving Tesco to buy nappies. "It's nice to have company during the day. It's gets a bit lonely in the house, actually, now that everyone is either at work or school…"

But despite all the help, Sherlock was having a difficult time. The London criminal underworld had inconveniently decided to become active right now, and apparently a lot of the criminal activity involved wizards, because Sirius was often out and about collecting information.

"What you told us about Crouch's house-elf is latest in a series of strange rumours that reached me," Sirius confided to Harry. "If you notice anything weird, go straight to Dumbledore. Otherwise keep your eyes open. Remus told me Dumbledore talked Mad-Eye out of retirement, which means he's reading the signs, even if no one else is."

"Who is Mad-Eye?" asked Harry.

"Alastor Moody; called 'Mad-eye' because of his magical eye. He was one of the best Aurors the Ministry ever had before he retired. Half the cells in Azkaban are full because of him."

"And an Auror is…?"

"The wizard equivalent of a police officer."

Harry nodded. "Be careful."

"I will, don't worry," Sirius assured him.

Harry wanted to discuss everything with his friends, but their collective workloads made it difficult to find the time to talk about it at length. All the fourth years had noticed a definite increase in the amount of work they were required to do this term. Professor

McGonagall explained why, when the class gave a particularly loud groan at the amount of Transfiguration homework she had assigned.

"You are now entering a most important phase of your magical education!" she told them, her eyes glinting dangerously behind her square spectacles. "Your Ordinary Wizarding Levels are drawing closer-"

"We don't take O.W.L.s till fifth year!" said Dean Thomas indignantly.

"Maybe not, Thomas, but believe me, you need all the preparation you can get! Mr. Potter and Miss Granger are the only two people in this class who have managed to turn a hedgehog into a satisfactory pincushion. I might remind you that *your* pincushion, Thomas, still curls up in fright if anyone approaches it with a pin!"

Hermione, who usually turned pink and flustered when complimented in class, only smiled tiredly in response. No wonder, for she was taking more subjects than anybody else, and after only a month into the term, her immense workload seemed to be getting to her. Every night, without fail, Hermione was seen in a corner of the common room, several tables spread with books, Arithmancy charts, rune dictionaries, diagrams of Muggles lifting heavy objects, and file upon file of extensive notes; she barely spoke to anybody and snapped when she was interrupted.

Ron had a sizeable workload, too. When he wasn't doing his own work, he was exchanging a lot of Owls with Mr. Jeremy, who was obviously leading a lucrative project for the MMN. He was so absorbed, he actually forgot about the case.

Harry, meanwhile, had to fit in his homework around violin lessons, visits to 221B and extra Potions work. Harry made virtually no improvements in Potions because, though Snape continued to ignore him in class, Harry couldn't return the favour because Snape was bullying Neville worse than ever. It was difficult to talk to Neville when he, Harry, was the reason why Neville was having such a miserable time, even though Neville assured Harry he didn't blame him the slightest. His inability to think of something that would stop Snape-besides cursing him into a hundred slimy pieces- only compounded his sense of helplessness. Julia helped where she

could, but she was a third year Hufflepuff. She had her own workload to handle, and her own House-mates to consider.

Thus Harry spent his days feeling trapped and lonely. Then one Friday evening, about a week before the delegation from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang was to arrive, it all just became too much. He stopped in the middle of his trek to the Music Room, lifted his face up towards the ceiling and whispered a silent plea:

"God I need help. I can't do this."

Harry listened to the silence for a few seconds before resuming his dragging steps.

Harry arrived at the music room about two minutes late. He pushed the door open, feeling even more depressed. He didn't meet Julia on the way as he usually did, and it wasn't very often he got to talk to someone who had idea what he was really going through. But apparently she was busy. Like everyone else.

He was wrong. Julia had arrived at the music room early, because the door hit her back.

Harry was about to apologise when he realised Julia wasn't moving. Shouldn't she at least turn around to see why the door hit her? What was she staring at?

Harry followed her line of sight and saw a man wearing a horrible purple T-shirt that had a simplified Star-Spangled Banner printed on the front, maroon skinny jeans, and lime green and pink tartan Sperry's. The underwear that was peeking out from the waistline of his trousers appeared to be fluorescent leopard print.

" *Didn't Miss Jackie sack you* !?" Harry shouted, unable to help himself.

Dr. Robert Dongyi Ju turned around and waved at them gawkily. "Hiiii. And yes, she did."

"Did she hire you *again* !?" Julia shouted, sounding very appalled.

Dr. Ju shook his head. "No. No one is that stupid."

"Then why are you here?!" Julia shouted again.

"Paying a visit?" said Dr. Ju innocently. Then he looked at the expressions of disbelief on Harry and Julia's faces and pulled a face. "Oh, c'mon, even crazies like me want to visit people who don't hate them…"

Harry wasn't sure how he was supposed to respond to that so he didn't. Neither did Julia, though the way her jaw was twitching said she had a lot to say about this, none of them even remotely polite.

"Silence is wiser in this case," said Dr. Ju, nodding sagely. "You're here for your music lessons, aren't you? You're going to have to wait a bit. Jackie's having a fight with her little brother."

"Uncle Jeremy?" Julia blurted. "What has he done now?"

"I have no idea," said Dr. Ju, then he looked at Harry and Julia keenly. "So how have you two been? Are you still thinking about werewolf cures?"

Harry felt a dull pang of guilt. He'd completely forgotten about Professor Lupin's monthly problems, which was frankly appalling because Lupin's lycanthropy was one of the main reasons why he'd decided to improve in Potions in the first place. Then Harry felt dejected again, because he couldn't see how he could achieve either of these goals.

"You stink of guilt and despair," said Ju to Harry, too accurately as he often was, before he turned his sharp gaze at Julia. "You, on the other hand, are really frustrated."

"There's no one to ask help to!" Julia exploded. "I even tried to ask Professor Snape, but he lately he looks like someone shoved a wand up his-"

"Okay, stop right there," Ju interrupted. "Say any more and you'll tarnish your soul."

Julia stopped. Then she looked at Ju in askance, but didn't ask to clarify.

"That's better," said Ju. "So you're angry at Professor Snape for not helping you. I understand that. Now let me ask you this: what would you do if you had to supervise twenty first years wielding sharp knives and open fires for an hour?"

Harry drew a blank. Why was Ju asking this question? Was he trying to make a point?

"Yes, I'm trying to make a point," said Ju. "Let's make the situation even *more* horrible: not only do you have to supervise aforementioned twenty first years, you have to prepare twenty sets of volatile, poisonous and magically dangerous materials and teach the first years how to brew a potion. The first years, being the cheeky little brats that they are, don't pay attention to your instructions and flick ingredients at each other-ingredients, if added the wrong way, can lead to cauldron meltdowns, which translates to second or third degree burns at the very least, or cauldron *explosions*, which can kill you. And when they're not throwing ingredients at each other for fun, they're daring their friends to *eat* some of the poisonous ingredients or stabbing each other with knives. Do you know what this means?"

Harry and Julia just stared at him blankly.

"Some more perspective, then," Ju said. "After spending an hour teaching first years and doing your best to prevent accidental murder, you have to teach *six* more classes afterwards, some of them lasting ninety minutes instead of forty-five, others containing more than twenty students, all of them handling even *more* dangerous materials… and don't forget the fire and sharp knives, which the students are now throwing at *you* . Then you have to spend *hours* cleaning up after the students, grading their homework and providing feedback. The average working time you put in is around eighty-six hours a week . That's more than double the average working hours of other people. Unreasonably assuming you only work during weekdays, you're working around seventeen hours a day. That leaves you barely enough time to eat and sleep. And forget socializing because you're too tired to even *talk* after work, unless it's to complain about the students. Do you understand what I'm driving at?"

"… Professor Snape has a very stressful job?" said Julia.

"Yes, and he doesn't have time to *spare*," said Ju. "So don't be surprised if he's always short-tempered or says he can't help you. He really *can't* ."

Harry and Julia said nothing. Neither of them had viewed their Potions classes or Snape this way. It also partially explained why Snape was always so short with Neville. Neville, who was extremely forgetful and clumsy, must look like a disaster waiting to happen.

That didn't mean he was justified though, Harry thought angrily. Surely Snape knew his bullying style was making things worse for everyone.

"It would be nice if each student got individual attention, but the reality is, very few people want to be teachers," said Ju. "So schools cram as many students as they dare into one class and fling an untrained teacher at them. When you're basically outnumbered thirty to one and have no idea what you're doing, there are only three ways of coping: befriend, be funny, or rule by fear. Many teachers opt for fear because students automatically assume their teachers are boring and not worth listening."

That was true, Harry had to acknowledge, but the fact that teachers in general had a reason to be horrible didn't alter the fact Snape was a horrible teacher in particular. If he was a halfway decent teacher, he would've ignored Neville so he could be less jittery, and stop Malfoy from flicking puffer-fish eyes at the Gryffindors and ruin their efforts.

"You're thinking in circles," said Ju sadly. "Let's move on then. Practically speaking, Professor Snape doesn't have the capacity to think about werewolf cures, which, let's be honest, is very speculative at this point."

"Why are *you* so interested?" asked Julia.

"Why shouldn't I be?" said Ju, frowning. "I'm a *healer* . I know I don't look like one, but I am. I'm always on the lookout for new remedies."

"Oh."

"It's actually more surprising young students like you are interested in werewolf cures," said Dr. Ju as he looked at them beadily. "Got any loved ones who are werewolves?"

Harry desperately tried not to blink. Julia turned quite inscrutable, too.

"I'll take that as a yes," said Dr. Ju.

"Why do you want to talk to *us* about it?" said Harry defiantly. "Like you said, we're just *students* ."

"You guys haven't given up," said Dr. Ju simply. "Except for Damocles Belby, who developed the Wolfsbane potion, there's been virtually no effort to develop werewolf treatments in the wizarding medical community for the last eight hundred years. I'd rather talk to a student who's still trying than an expert who's given up."

That wasn't the response Harry was expecting at all.

"So what's giving you trouble?" asked Dr. Ju. "I could help."

Harry hesitated. He was still wary of Dr. Ju, but so far he'd proved himself quite harmless-very helpful, as a matter of fact. He had also been around Sherlock for too long to not know just because a person was on the side of the angels, didn't mean the person was going to be pleasant or nice or even *normal.*

"… I just don't *get* Potions," said Harry at length. "I can make them okay, but I don't understand why I'm doing what I'm doing."

Dr. Ju beamed.

"People rarely ask that question," he said. "Most wizards and witches are content to simply know *how* to brew a potion and leave it at that."

Chuckling, Dr. Ju looked around the music room.

"Looks like Jackie isn't going to show up for a while," he said. "If you

like, I can give you two a primer on Potions. Keep in mind I'm American and not a teacher, so I don't give a flip about tradition or British school standards."

Harry recalled Dr. Ju's rant over cauldrons and nodded.

"In order to make sense of Potions, you need to think *soup*," Dr. Ju started. "Because that's what a potion is: a soup. I mean, you make it in a pot full of liquid over an open fire, you shove a bunch of ingredients into it and simmer them all together to mingle the 'flavors'. If that's not a soup, I don't know what is."

Harry grinned at the irreverent description and wondered how Snape would respond to it.

"Now soup has three basic components: a flavorful liquid, spices, and chunkies. Yes, chunkies is a technical term for whatever solids you use in soup," said Dr. Ju. "Now what do you need in order to *make* soup?"

"A vessel?" said Julia.

"Yes. What else?"

"A heating element," Julia continued, "solid ingredients; liquid base; *time* ."

"Yes. Very good. Anything you want to add?" said Dr. Ju, looking at Harry.

"Something to stir it with?" Harry guessed.

"I'd put that under *tools*, but yes, a stirring instrument; a knife; whatever else you need besides the vessel, which I treat as a separate category," said Dr. Ju. "Then there is the thing that's confusing you: the *recipe* .

"A recipe is like directions," Dr. Ju said. "It tells you how to go from point A to point B. In this case, point A is the ingredients and point B is the soup. Now, as long as you have the ingredients and follow the recipe, you can go from point A to point B. But what if there is a road block? What if you actually want to go from point B to point *A* ? What

if you're starting on point C instead of A? What do you need, then?"

"A map?" said Julia.

"Yes, a *map*," said Dr. Ju, nodding. "If you have a good map, you don't need directions. Maps can also tell you why the directions are the way they are. And with a map you can find the route yourself, and, as need be, make improvements or corrections. Potions are a lot more forgiving than people think; you just need to be able to read the *map* ."

"But what *is* the map?" asked Harry.

"Remember a potion is a *soup*," said Dr. Ju. "For soup you want all the individual flavors to mingle together. Your map, then, are the different ways that let these flavors mingle. Now for potions, the flavors you're after are the *magic* inside the ingredients, yes?"

Harry and Julia nodded.

"So it makes perfect sense to use magical plants and animals to make a potion. But a lot of the ingredients a potion recipe calls you to add *aren't* inherently magical. I mean: rat tails, cat spleen, eye of newt, possum brains, frog spawn, *leeches*… all of this stuff is inedible. In fact most of them are *poisonous* . So why the heck are we putting them in our *soup* ?"

Harry always wondered about that.

"The cats, newts and possums you use in potions are *specifically* raised in magic-rich environments," Dr. Ju explained. "You're not going to get the same effect with Muggle raised animals. Though the animals themselves don't have magic, they become *imbued* with the magic of their surroundings. This imbued magic then starts taking on the animals' characteristics."

" *Ooooh*," said Harry and Julia together.

"For the same reason, different body parts take on different magical characteristics," Dr. Ju continued. "Eye of a newt will have different magical properties than newt gizzard. But the magic of both body parts will have a 'newt-ness' about it. On the same token, how the

magic of individual ingredients interact with each other depends on their *source* . For example, no potion recipe will add the essence of rat and cat parts at the same time because their magic clashes."

Harry nodded again. He felt very excited- at long last, things were starting to make *sense* .

"The number of stirs, the direction of stirs and how long you keep the potion brewing has significance, too," said Dr. Ju. "Clockwise in magic speak means 'according to the flow'. *Counter-* clockwise signifies 'against the flow'. Stirring physically mingles the ingredients together. Remember: magic *must* be tied down to an underlying physical reality. You need to physically mingle the ingredients together in order to mingle their magic. But the *number* of stirs, there's a reason why potion recipes specify that. Have you ever wondered why some recipes depend on moon phases?"

"Yes," said Harry swiftly.

"I'll be blunt: whatever your textbooks say, it's not because there's magic in moonbeams," said Dr. Ju, "You know from your Primary school science class that moonlight is just sunlight reflecting off the moon. No one attributes sunlight magical properties. So why give the moon magical properties? It's just a lifeless rock rotating around the earth, okay?"

Harry grinned again. "So what is the real reason?"

"It's the number of *days* the moon takes to rotate around Earth," said Dr. Ju. "Most of the potions you learn in class have ancient roots, and their recipes has remained virtually unchanged. *That's* why wizards and witches still use the moon as a *timing device* for potions, even though we have better timing devices and the moon doesn't actually contribute anything. *Numbers*, on the other hand, definitely have magical properties. The number twenty-nine, which is the number of days it takes the moon to rotate around the earth, has special magical properties because it's a prime number."

" *Arithmancy*," Julia breathed.

"Yes," said Dr. Ju, nodding. "This might surprise you, but knowing a

bit of Arithmancy actually helps you understand Potions."

"So the six days of stewing and seven stirs, they're…" said Harry.

"All there for a reason," said Dr. Ju. "Six in magic speak means incomplete, needing one more. Seven in magic speak means *rest* or *complete* . Three is stability and unity. Check your potions recipes; you'll always see a six for the second to last step and a seven for the step that takes the longest."

Harry nodded slowly.

"You might want to review all the potion recipes you've learned so far and see if you can see the patterns," said Dr. Ju. "Now one final thought: you must *never* treat potions the same way you treat spells. Spells draw the magic that is inside of you; that's why we say spells represent magic of *people* . Potions, on the other hand, draw magic that is *outside* of you; that's why we say potions represent magic of *nature* . And before you even think about taming nature, you need to first understand it on *its own* terms, not yours. Does this help you?"

" *Yes*," said Harry fervently. "Snape never taught us this stuff…"

"He did, actually," said Julia.

Harry stared at her.

"Not as directly as Dr. Ju, but he did," said Julia, rather grudgingly. "He usually mentions it in passing when he puts notes on the board…"

Harry would have to see for it himself before he believed it. "Right…"

"You know, I might've had a better time learning Potions if my father presented it the way you did."

The three of them looked around to see who spoke. Dr. Ju went misty eyed when he saw Miss Jackie, smartly dressed in the peach-coloured blazer, azure blouse and black trousers.

"You're wearing *color*," said Dr. Ju, an uplifted expression on his face, "You know colors *exist* ."

Miss Jackie took in Dr. Ju's hideous outfight and sighed.

"I won't comment on your colour-coordinating ability today, Robert," she said. "Sorry, Julia darling, Harry; Jeremy wouldn't let me leave until he and I 'made peace'."

"You mean until he successfully brow-beat you into doing what he wants," said Julia.

Miss Jackie nodded; her expression was uncharacteristically resentful. "One of these days I'm going to make *him* relent," she muttered.

"What did he want you to do?" asked Harry.

"You better ask Ron. I can't trust myself to speak right now," said Miss Jackie curtly. Then she took a few deep breaths through her nose. "Come along dears. I shouldn't keep you here too long."

Harry spent the next half hour practicing a Kreisler piece.

"Does he visit you often?" asked Harry, referring to Dr. Ju.

"No," said Miss Jackie, turning a pale pink. "He has his own work at Johns Hopkins, and I'm here in Hogwarts."

"He comes all the way from America to see you?" said Harry incredulously.

"He works at St. Mungo's, too, for a single shift," said Miss Jackie, turning pinker.

Harry stared some more. "But all across the *Atlantic* ?"

"Americans have different standards for distance," said Miss Jackie, who was very red now and wasn't meeting his eye. "They think forty miles of driving is 'not bad', and American magic people regularly Apparate from the East Coast to West Coast. The distance alone would qualify that as international Apparation…"

Miss Jackie refused to further talk about the matter afterwards. When Harry met Julia after his lessons, he noticed Julia looked

visibly horrified when she left her own screened area. The look of horror only increased as they watched Dr. Ju and Miss Jackie talk about… magic-charged space ships, from the sound of it.

"D'you think they're…?" said Harry as they left the music room.

" *No* . No one can be that crazy," said Julia, shaking her head furiously in denial.

"John and Dr. Ju were engaged once," Harry argued.

"But she married Sherlock instead," said Julia, as though that settled the matter.

Harry refused to admit that, yes, it actually did. "Extraordinary circumstances."

"Still married-and happily."

"They have a lot in common!"

" *Exactly!* " Julia said, flinging her hands up in the air. Then she fumed. "No. *No way.* What can they even talk about?"

"Magic-charged space ships?"

Julia hit him with her tote.

Harry returned to the Gryffindor common room just before curfew.

"Miss Jackie started late, didn't she?" said Ron as Harry sat down at his table. Hermione, who on the other side, was barely visible behind several tottering piles of books.

"Yeah; so what was the fight about?" asked Harry.

"Remember Bagman? Turns out he asked Mr. Jeremy after the World Cup if Miss Jackie would be interested in broadcasting the Triwizard Tournament over the MMN. Well, Mr. Jeremy agreed to the deal, but didn't bother to tell Miss Jackie until today."

Harry winced and Hermione jerked her head up, looking outraged.

"She was really upset," Ron continued ruefully. "She even yelled at him; said she didn't want to do it. But Bagman already cleared it with the ministry and I've already advertised it over the MMN, so she can't back out."

"I can't believe he just hijacked her name like that!" Hermione exclaimed. "And you, Ron! I can't believe you just went along with it!"

"I didn't know she didn't know!" said Ron in frustration. "He kept sending me Owls that made it sound like she knew, but didn't care! You know she just lets me do whatever because she hates dealing with the business stuff…"

"So he tricked you too! Oh, this is just not *right* !" said Hermione shrilly. "You better stop working with him, Ron! I mean, what kind of person does that to their own *sister* ?"

"He says he's doing it *because* she's his sister," muttered Ron. "You know how she's like- offering to do stuff for free just because someone needs help and then almost killing herself doing it… she'd really work herself to death if Mr. Jeremy didn't stop her and made sure she gets paid. It's not like he's doing it for himself, you know; he just wants people to know how brilliant Miss Jackie is. I mean, just look at the stuff she makes for fun."

"But doing it behind her back?"

"I have a bad feeling about it, too," said Ron miserably. "Mr. Jeremy keeps trying to put Miss Jackie in the spotlight, but she *hates* that kind of stuff. I don't know what to do."

"Just stop listening to him!" Hermione snapped as she returned to her homework. " *You're* the one who has the final say on Miss Jackie's business! Don't let him decide for you!"

"But a lot of his suggestions are really good," mumbled Ron in a voice too low for Hermione hear. "I mean, broadcasting the Triwizard Tournament, that's brilliant."

Silence fell on their table as the conversation died on that note. Harry retrieved his old Potions notes and textbooks from his trunk and started reading through them. To his chagrin, Harry quickly discovered Julia was right; Snape *had* covered the stuff Dr. Ju mentioned in his short lecture on Potions.

"How's she doing it?" Ron muttered to Harry.

"Doing what?" said Harry without looking up.

" *Going to all her classes* !" Ron said. "She stopped trying to learn how to make clones, so that can't be it. I heard her talking to Professor Vector this afternoon, and they were going on about last Tuesday's lesson, but Hermione can't've been there, because she was with us in Muggle Studies! And you told me she's never missed a Study of Ancient Runes class, but half of them are at the same time as Charms, and she's never missed one of them either!"

Harry paused. He had a very good idea how Hermione was managing her impossible timetable, but he wasn't supposed to know she had a time-turner. Harry contemplating telling Ron in private, but then he'd have to tell him when and how he knew. Could he stand the inevitable nagging that would follow?

"Well she's obviously able to be at two places at the same time, somehow," said Harry slowly. "And it's not really about *how* she's going to all her classes, is it? It's about her workload."

"Well, yeah," said Ron. "And if it's *this* bad this year, can you imagine how bad it's going to be when we take our O.W.L.s?"

Harry nodded, and then peered around Hermione's book barricade.

"Can I interrupt?" he asked.

"I suppose so," said Hermione, stopping her quill for a moment.

Harry looked around, taking in the long Arithmancy essay, on which the ink was still glistening, at the even longer Muggle Studies essay and at the rune translation Hermione was now poring over.

"How are you getting through all this stuff?" Harry asked her.

"Oh, well-you know-working hard," said Hermione. Close-up, Harry saw that she looked almost as tired as Lupin.

"Why don't you just drop a subject?" Harry asked, watching her lifting books as she searched for her rune dictionary.

"I couldn't do that!" said Hermione, looking scandalized.

"Why not? You can't be interested in all of them."

"But I *am* !" said Hermione earnestly. "Take Arithmancy: it's my favourite subject! It's just *wonderful* -"

Harry recalled Dr. Ju saying knowing a bit of Arithmancy was helpful for learning Potions, and wondered if he should chuck the Study of Ancient Runes and take Arithmancy instead. But once he spied the complicated-looking number chart next to Hermione's Arithmancy essay, Harry decided: NO. No, no, *no* .

"Arithmancy looks *terrible*," said Harry. "But that's just me. Hermione, I don't… I'm not going to ask how you're going to all your classes. But whatever it is that you're using to… do it, can't you use it to do your homework, too?"

Hermione gaped at him, as though she was struck dumb.

"But I'm only supposed to use it for *class*…" she protested weakly.

"Homework is for class," Harry pointed out.

"He has a point," said Ron quickly from other side of the book barricade.

His words apparently drained what was left of Hermione's energy; she slumped forward and landed face-first on her pile of homework essays.

"I don't believe this!" Hermione wailed into table. "I can't believe I was so *stupid* !"

"You know what, Hermione?" said Ron, looking down from the top of Hermione's book barricade. "I reckon you're cracking up. You're

trying to do too much."

"No, I'm not!" said Hermione, sitting up abruptly and brushing her hair out of her eyes. "I just have to use my time more efficiently, that's all!"

"But that's the *problem*," Ron said as Hermione looked around hopelessly for her book bag. "You don't *have* time."

Final Notes : Sherlock and Snape are *eejits* . Sherlock is double the eejit for thinking he can make schedules for babies before knowing anything about his.

The mythological British sprite called a house brownie, like house-elves, secretly takes care of a household, will leave if given clothes or formal payment, but appreciate offerings of cream or honey or porridge. The honey bit tickled me since the original Sherlock Holmes retired to keep bees.

For all ye astronomers out there, yes, I know the average length of a lunar cycle is 29.530589 days. I picked 29 for convenience.

Suggestions on ugly outfits for Robert are always welcomed. I'm tempted to visit my local thrift shop to look for items he might wear…

A Dissident View

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty One: A Dissident View

Hermione woke up early next morning with a head full of blind-panic. Once she placed the source of her panic, she got up, left the dormitory without waking up any of the girls, and padded down to the deserted common room. Here she took out her personal timetable and started pondering it.

The chief difficulty was finding timeslots where she could make her trips without being seen, Hermione thought anxiously. She'd already established a pattern of studying in the common room, and people might notice any change. She could say she was in the library, but the library closed an hour before curfew and that hour was precisely what she needed to squeeze more homework time. She needed a plausible excuse for her absences. The music chamber was an option, of course, and Hermione was certain Miss Jackie wouldn't mind her studying inside one of the noise cancelling screens. The trick was how to do it without her friends knowing when the Music Room was Harry and Julia's favourite evening haunt throughout the week.

Hermione let go of the hair she was fisting and rubbed her eyes. She couldn't think. Her eyeballs felt as though they'd swollen inside their sockets, and her brain felt as though it was made of nylon-non-

absorbent and full of static. She'd even taken up coffee-drinking to help her go through the day, but it had been a long time since she felt the alertness from the first time she drank the stuff.

Hermione was still nowhere near making a plausible plan when her fellow Gryffindors started milling out from the dormitories.

"Have you been working since the crack of dawn?" asked Ron incredulously when he spotted her.

Hermione stared at the boys numbly. The early morning hours. Of course. Hardly anyone was up by then. She could use that time to make the trips. Why didn't she think of this earlier?

"Oi, are you there?" asked Ron, waving a hand in front of Hermione's face and looking concerned. "C'mon, let's go to the Great Hall. You won't be able to stay up if you don't eat a decent meal."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Hermione abstractly. "I wonder what we're having. I'm starving."

"Same as usual I expect, but…" Ron pointed at the table. "Where are your books?"

Hermione blinked. "I must've put it back in my dorm. Wait for me."

"Why do you need them? It's Saturday!"

"Homework!" shouted Hermione as she dashed back to the girl's dormitory. There she started stuffing her books haphazardly into her bag. But it was no use, her bag just wasn't big enough, Hermione thought furiously as she lugged the bulging bag on her shoulders, nearly falling backwards as she did so.

"I think it's time to think about Expansion Charms," said Harry over breakfast as he stared at her book bag.

"That's NEWT level," said Hermione as she mechanically spread marmalade over her toast. She didn't have any appetite, honestly, but she had to eat get through the day. "I *do* wish we learned about them, but I don't think we start that until seventh year…"

Harry put on the bland look he always assumed when he had things in his head he didn't want to say. Hermione was too tired to ponder what was churning inside that inscrutable brain of his.

"Are any of you free today?" asked Ron.

"Of course not, do you have any idea how much I have to do?" Hermione snapped.

"No, I had absolutely no idea," grumbled Ron. "Just so you know: Miss Jackie's going to start working on the Triwizard Tournament broadcast today and she needs camera people."

Hermione dropped her knife.

"You mean we get to see how she did the World Cup broadcast?" she squeaked.

"Well, yeah," said Ron exasperatedly. "She wanted to keep it very quiet, so she asked me to ask us… but you're too busy, aren't you?"

"Nonsense. I can make time," said Hermione, feeling her face heat up as she thought logistics. Three hours. Three hours early Sunday morning. That ought to be enough to finish the rest of her reading after she tackled her Potions and Transfiguration essays this afternoon…

Hermione followed Harry, Ron, Neville and Julia to the Music Room. Ron irritated her to distraction by keep telling her she ought to spend her time doing more productive things, like napping (honestly!).

"You do look like you need one," said Julia tentatively.

"I'm *fine* !" snapped Hermione. "Stop nagging me!"

The rest of the trek to the Music Room continued in an awkward silence.

They found Miss Jackie at her private corner of the music room, pulling an iMac out of its box packaging. She was dressed in a plain black jumper, blue jeans and black New Balances; it was the most casual they'd ever seen her be.

"Good morning," she said, smiling. "Can you lend me a hand here?"

"Are these for the broadcast?" asked Julia as they came over.

"No, these are just for show," said Miss Jackie. "I have deep qualms against anyone learning my so-called camera trick, so I'm going to make it look like I'm using regular video editing."

"Wouldn't people know you're not using regular video editing?"

"Yes, but putting this up won't help them figure it out, and obfuscation is what I'm after," said Miss Jackie grimly.

It took about twenty minutes to get the new iMacs, inkjet printer, digital cameras and other electronic equipment out from their packaging and onto the desks Miss Jackie indicated. Once they'd done so, Hermione and her friends hung back and just watched, as no one knew how to connect everything together except Miss Jackie.

"Okay, all set," said Miss Jackie after she successfully turned on the iMacs, which were powered by the enchanted windmill generators. "Now let's get down to the business of broadcasting, shall we?"

The five of them gathered eagerly around her.

"Before I let you know anything about it, I need you to sign this," said Miss Jackie as she solemnly held up a sheet of parchment that had at least two signatures on it already. "Signing this puts you under a binding magical contract; you're basically agreeing to never divulge anything I've told you about the Magical Mobile Network's broadcasting technique. You must not mention the name of the technique, any spells or enchantments the technique uses, names of people associated with its development, or that you've signed a binding magical contract to keep the technique secret unless I tell you otherwise. If you can't shoulder this responsibility, you better leave right now."

Neville shivered. Ron and Harry stared wide-eyed at Miss Jackie, and even Julia blinked at her aunt.

"Why all the secrecy?" asked Hermione. "What will happen if we

break the contract?"

Miss Jackie twisted her mouth into a crooked half-smile.

"If you break the contract, your magic is forfeit," she said. "And you will know why it has to be secret once you've sign it."

Hermione felt a chill in the pit of her stomach. What kind of enchantment was it, that Miss Jackie would enforce such a dire consequence?

Hermione, Ron and Harry signed their names on the parchment, which Miss Jackie folded so they wouldn't be able to see the signatures already on it. Hermione had a strong feeling of submitting to a binding vow when she signed her name. Neville jotted his name, too, after much hesitation, and Julia signed her name under his. Once they'd finished, Miss Jackie wordlessly rolled up the parchment and put it in her cream-coloured handbag. Then she took out a familiar-looking rice paper sheet full of symbols from her pocket.

"This is the secret," Miss Jackie announced.

Hermione recognised it immediately. "Your memory-harvesting charm!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Miss Jackie. "As you all know, Julia's dad couldn't go to the World Cup due to unforeseen circumstances, and this was the closest thing to a magical video recorder that I could come up with in a week. I never intended to use it for public consumption, but then my fool of a brother went ahead and sold the World Cup broadcasting deal to the Ministry of Magic."

Ron goggled, mouthing ' *even the World Cup…?* ' which made Hermione even more incensed at Mr. Jeremy. So he lied to Ron and Miss Jackie since the World Cup! The nerve of the man!

"So the live footage of the World Cup, it was-" Harry asked while Hermione fumed.

"My memory of the event," said Miss Jackie, "Or more precisely, one of my clone's memory of the event. I couldn't risk broadcasting my

own memories since the viewer was still Beta version."

"How did you broadcast the memories?" asked Julia, who swelling with deep interest.

"I can't tell you that," Miss Jackie replied. "No, don't argue. This charm is all I'm willing to disclose."

Julia deflated completely.

"Why is the charm so dangerous?" Harry asked. "All it does is harvest your clone's memory."

"Harvesting my clone's memory was my sole intention when I made this," said Miss Jackie wryly. "But this charm can do more than that. Most memory spells of this stripe only works on the caster, but this charm can harvest someone else's memory without their permission. The possibility of abuse is endless: You can siphon off someone's most painful memory and show it to the world, or you can target an important government official and harvest their memories of handling secrets. All concept of privacy would vanish if this goes public. Can't you see how dangerous it can be?"

The five of them nodded slowly.

"Hence the magical contract," said Miss Jackie. Then she sighed wearily. "I'm very sorry, I really didn't want to put this kind of burden on you, but…" she slumped. "… Jeremy is on a warpath to market all of my inventions. I can't afford to let him know about this. The contract magically limits the knowledge to the people who signed it. The contract is now closed, so that eliminates the possibility of him knowing it as long as you lot don't break it."

"Why'd you choose m-eh, *us* ?" asked Neville timidly.

"I've already shown Harry, Ron and Hermione this charm. Julia has seen it since she was little, though I didn't tell her what it was until I told them. Neville, you're best friends with these four, so it is only a matter of time before they told you about this charm."

Neville nodded as he looked down, turning very pink. There was a bit of a pause.

"You must've realised how dangerous your charm can be only recently," said Hermione thoughtfully. "Why did it take you so long?"

Miss Jackie blushed. "I don't… I hardly ever share my work with other people. All my friends are Muggles, so it not as if I could. It didn't occur to me to think about how other people might use them since I'm the only intended user. It was only after MMN took off I started to ask these kinds of questions."

It made sense, Hermione supposed. Miss Jackie's Magical Mobile business only began two years ago because the Basilisk attacks forced her to disclose her laptop's contents to Sherlock, which in turn led Hermione and her friends to develop the first Magical Mobile phone. Had the Chamber of Secrets debacle not happened, no one would've known anything about Miss Jackie's inventions.

"So do you understand what you need to do?" asked Miss Jackie.

The five of them nodded. "Just watch and let the charm do its work," said Ron.

"Correct," said Miss Jackie. "Now for security purposes, I want the charm to only work for you. I need your help with that."

"Is it going to be difficult?" asked Neville nervously. "I'm no good at this sort of thing…"

"You'll do fine, Neville," said Miss Jackie kindly. "It's so easy even a virtual Squib like me can do it."

"You're not a Squib," Julia muttered.

"Considering how much magic I don't have, I might as well be," said Miss Jackie airily. "But that's irrelevant. The point of interest lay in the fact for paper charms, the person who fuels the magic behind a spell and the person who defines the spell don't have to be the same, as it is the case for wands." She patted the inkjet printer on the desk. "I've already designed the charms on my computer. All you have to do is put a drop of your own blood into the ink cartridge. That way your blood would mix with the enchanted ink when I print the charm out."

"It's okay, it's just how Oriental style magic works," Ron whispered to Neville when he sputtered in dismay.

They obligingly prinked their fingers one person at a time, the next person in line donating their blood only after Miss Jackie finished printing the customized paper charm for the person whose turn it was. All of the charms were different; Hermione and Harry's were written in Runes, Ron and Neville's were written in Latin and they had to donate two drops of blood instead of one, and Julia's was written in Chinese (presumably).

"I never understood why this is the basically the same thing as wand-spells," said Julia as she held her charm up.

"Language, Julia darling," said Miss Jackie. "Spells are magic of people. People express themselves through language. That's why spells can either be written or spoken; the intent behind the words is the same either way."

Julia turned to Miss Jackie sharply.

"You mean you can craft spells with *any* kind of language?" she demanded.

"Yes," Miss Jackie replied. "It's not something European magic communities know much about, since most of their spells are based on verbal language, but there are entire branches of magic based on body language. North East Asia developed a particular branch of spells you can cast using hand signs(印), and Africa and South America often use dancing for spells. I've also been told Native Americans have spells you cast with marching *feet* ."

Hermione was entirely fascinated. Spells you could cast via body language! Who would have thought? None of the books she'd read mentioned anything of the sort…

"So spells are really not about particular words, just the intent behind the words," said Harry, awed, as Julia shook her upturn hands minutely with her mouth open, apparently in the throes of an epiphany. "So why did you use Runes to make mine and Hermione's?"

"You two take the Study of Ancient Runes, don't you?"

"Yes…?"

"I can construct a paper charm for you, but you still need to understand the incantation to make it work," Miss Jackie explained. "Having said that, I could've just written them all in Latin, but Latin, you have to put one character in front of another to construct a word, so it takes a lot of individual characters to get the intent across. I wanted to limit the blood usage to bare minimum, so that's why I used Runes for you two, since you're familiar with them. Ron and Neville I used Latin, but as you can see theirs are big to the point of being cumbersome."

That was true; Ron and Neville's paper charms were easily twice the size of Hermione and Harry's and three times the length of Julia's.

Harry studied his paper charm.

"So Runes are better than Latin for written spells," he remarked.

"Runes were created for the express purpose of casting written spells, so no wonder."

Harry nodded thoughtfully.

"Any more questions?" Miss Jackie asked.

Harry pointed at the heap of boxes that once contained the iMacs and other such equipment.

"Why do all these boxes have an American address on them? Baltimore is an American city, isn't it?"

Miss Jackie turned bright pink and refused to answer.

Hermione also noted Julia's face crumpled when she did so.

Later that Saturday afternoon, Hermione left the Gryffindor tower ostensibly to go to the library. She didn't tell Harry, Ron or Neville

who she was planning to meet there and what she was going to do, as she had a strong feeling it wasn't something she could discuss with the *boys* .

Julia and Ginny were waiting for her at the Library entrance. Instead of going inside, they headed to the lake.

"She's seeing someone," Julia finally admitted after Hermione and Ginny questioned her on why Miss Jackie had her electronic goods delivered to an American address and why she blushed when Harry pointed it out.

Hermione's heart took a huge leap of excitement. "Oooooh, who is it?"

"I don't know," said Julia sullenly.

"You must have some idea who or you wouldn't admit that she is," Hermione pressed.

Julia didn't reply and toyed with a pebble on the ground.

"What is he like?" asked Ginny.

Julia threw the pebble into the lake. "Weird. No fashion sense. So American it makes your teeth hurt. But not bad," she added the last bit very grudgingly.

"You don't seem very happy about it," Ginny noted.

"Why should I be?" Julia grouched.

"He's good for her!" Hermione argued. "Everyone noticed her health is loads better, and her working schedule is getting a lot more reasonable! Clearly her boyfriend is the reason!"

Julia threw another pebble. "So what?"

"'So what'?" said Hermione incredulously, "But Julia, this is probably the best thing that happened to her in a long time! And didn't you say she never dated anyone before? Surely-"

" *She's my mum!* " Julia shouted, rounding on her. "Do *you* want your mum to date a man who's not your dad?!"

Hermione slapped a hand over her mouth and Ginny shut her's with a click.

"Until I was seven, I honestly thought she was my mum," said Julia in a voice choked with tears. "I always wondered why she didn't live with me and dad. When I learned about divorce, I thought that was why, so I kept telling dad he should marry her again. Uncle Jason had to sit me down and tell me she was my *aunt.* Then he forced me to stop calling her mum in front of people."

Hermione felt about six inches tall, she was so ashamed. Oblivious, Julia wiped her eyes.

"I used to have this dream," she whispered, "that one day my dad would finally come to his senses and they'd get married and I could properly call her mum. But year after year it was a different woman- never her. I used to hate him for it. I know better now…"

"You know the real reason?" asked Ginny cautiously.

Julia nodded. "My dad's twenty years older than Auntie Jack."

Both Hermione and Ginny looked down. *Ew* .

"I know it's stupid and selfish," said Julia. "But… I never stopped hoping it might happen, even after Ellen." She wiped her eyes again. "Now she's dating someone from bloody America and if they get really serious, she might move there. I don't want to lose my mum again."

Then she buried her face into her knees and hugged them.

Hermione and Ginny spent the next hour trying to console Julia, but frankly having no idea how. It was a complete conundrum; they dare not say Miss Jackie would get over her current relationship because that would be horrid, but saying everything would work out when there was no clear way it could sounded hollow.

In the end, the three of them returned to the castle and went their

separate ways, Julia trudging back to the Hufflepuff common room looking absolutely dejected.

Hermione was unable to focus on her schoolwork for the rest of the afternoon, for she couldn't help but fret over Julia's situation. At length she gave up, rolled up her finished Transfiguration essay and half-done Potions essay into her bag, and joined the boys at the Great Hall for dinner.

"Did you get a lot done?" Harry asked as she sat down.

Hermione felt her anger flair up against him. Didn't he know what Julia was going through? Why hadn't he figured out what Miss Jackie dating implied? He was the best at deductions out of the five of them, after all!

" *No*," she snarled.

Harry blinked. Ron paused his chewing.

"Okay, so you didn't get as much as you wanted done. That doesn't mean you can take your temper out on us," said Ron in a reasonable tone.

Hermione's anger spread to him. " *Shut up!* "

The boys shared a look. Then they shrugged in one accord and bent down to their steaks.

All throughout Sunday, Hermione kept a close watch over Julia. No one who saw her would've guessed she was struggling inside; she had the same mild expression as always, and her speech had the same calm and thoughtful quality to it. This left Hermione marvelling at the depths Julia's emotional control and wondering if there were other things she was keeping to herself.

The boys remained in their blissful oblivion as they prepared for the Triwizard Tournament broadcast that afternoon, as soon as Harry returned from his Sunday morning meetings with Terry Boot from Ravenclaw.

"The delegation is supposed to show up here," said Ron as they stood outside the stone steps leading to the main oak doors to Hogwarts.

"Any idea how they're going to get here?" asked Harry.

"Dunno. But I expect they'd put quite a show."

"Nothing discreet like a portkey, then," said Harry thoughtfully. "Say, shouldn't we stand in the front so we can get an unobstructed view?"

"Good point," said Ron, nodding. "And d'you think we should get permission to walk around with the Glidecam we're supposed to be using?"

"We'd have to show it to Professor McGonagall either way, if you don't want it confiscated," Julia pointed out.

"Another good point," said Ron. "Okay, let's go ask McGonagall."

"And when we do get permission, we should do a few test rounds," said Hermione. "Things can go wrong after all, and we need all the practice we can get."

"Yeah, let's do that."

The filming process slowly came together as the day inched towards the evening. By dinner time, even Neville was feeling confident about the broadcast. Then Monday came, and Hermione, Ron, Harry and Neville was unable to proceed from the entrance hall after Care of Magical Creatures class, owing to the large crowd of students congregated there, all milling around a large sign that had been erected at the foot of the marble staircase. Ron, the tallest of the four, stood on tiptoe to see over the heads in front of them and read the sign aloud to the other three:

TRIWIZARD TOURNAMENT

THE DELEGATIONS FROM BEAUXBATONS AND DURMSTRANG WILL BE ARRIVING AT 6 O'CLOCK ON FRIDAY THE 30TH OF OCTOBER. LESSONS WILL END HALF AN HOUR EARLY. STUDENTS WILL RETURN THEIR BAGS AND BOOKS TO THEIR

DORMITORIES AND ASSEMBLE IN FRONT OF THE CASTLE TO GREET OUR GUESTS BEFORE THE WELCOMING FEAST.

"Only a week away!" said Ernie Macmillan of Hufflepuff, emerging from the crowd, his eyes gleaming. "I wonder if Cedric knows? Think I'll go and tell him…"

"Cedric?" said Neville blankly as Ernie hurried off.

"Diggory from Hufflepuff," said Harry. "He's entering the tournament."

"That idiot, Hogwarts champion?" said Ron as they pushed their way through the chattering crowd toward the staircase.

"He's not an idiot. You just don't like him because he's not Gryffindor," said Hermione. "Julia told me he's a really good student- and he's a *prefect* ."

"You only like him because he's *handsome*," said Ron scathingly.

"Excuse me, I don't like people just because they're handsome!" said Hermione indignantly.

Ron gave a loud, obviously false cough, which oddly sounded like: *"Lockhart!* "

Julia didn't join them for lunch that day, opting to talk animatedly with her house-mates at the Hufflepuff table. From the way they were pointing at Cedric, it was clear they were discussing his chances as Hogwarts champion. The other inhabitants of the castle were engaged in similar topics of conversation: who was going to try for Hogwarts champion, what the tournament would involve, how the students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang differed from themselves.

The staff seemed to turn tenser as the week went by. Professor McGonagall exploded on Neville when he accidentally transplanted his ears to a cactus during their Switching Spell lesson, and Argus Filch, the caretaker, was ferociously territorial over the castle, which seemed to be undergoing an extra-thorough cleaning. Several grimy portraits had been scrubbed, much to the displeasure of their

subjects, who sat huddled in their frames muttering darkly and wincing as they felt their raw pink faces. The suits of armour were suddenly gleaming and moving without squeaking.

When they went down to breakfast on the morning of the thirtieth of October, they found that the Great Hall had been decorated overnight. Enormous silk banners hung from the walls, each of them representing a Hogwarts House: red with a gold lion for Gryffindor, blue with a bronze eagle for Ravenclaw, yellow with a black badger for Hufflepuff and green with a silver serpent for Slytherin. Behind the teachers' table, the largest banner of all bore the Hogwarts coat of arms: lion, eagle, badger, and snake united around a large letter H.

Hermione, Ron, Harry and Neville sat down beside Fred and George at the Gryffindor table. Once again, and most unusually, they were sitting apart from everyone else and conversing in low voices. Ron led the way over to them.

"At least he's writing back to us," George was saying gloomily to Fred. "But I doubt he'll hear us out. We'll just have to argue our case in person…"

"Who's not listening to you?" said Ron, sitting down next to them.

"You," said Fred, looking irritated at the interruption.

"Who are you writing to?" Ron asked George.

"No one you care about," said George.

"You two got any ideas on the Triwizard Tournament yet?" Harry asked. "Thought any more about trying to enter?"

"I asked McGonagall how the champions are chosen but she wasn't telling," said George bitterly. "She just told me to shut up and get on with transfiguring my raccoon."

"Wonder what the tasks are going to be?" said Ron thoughtfully. "You know, I bet we could do them, Harry. We've done dangerous stuff before…"

"Not in front of a panel of judges, you haven't," said Fred. "McGonagall says the champions get awarded points according to how well they've done the tasks."

"And we never did any of the dangerous stuff alone. That's not allowed, is it?" Harry said. "So who are the judges?"

"Well, the Heads of the participating schools are always on the panel," said Hermione, "I know because all three of them were injured during the Tournament of 1792, when a cockatrice the champions were supposed to be catching went on the rampage." Then she noticed everyone around her was staring, looking rather surprised, so she let out an aggrieved sigh. "It's all in *Hogwarts, A History* . Honestly, you lot should read it one of these days…"

"Why should we, when we have you?" said Ron.

Hermione was opening her mouth to retort, but the whooshing noise from overhead, which announced the arrival of the post owls, interrupted her. It was a very small flock this morning, as it often was the case these days. Ever since the Magical Mobile Network opened to the general public, more and more people stopped using post owls and letters for communication, only using the former for parcel deliveries. Harry reported the owls in the owlry were terribly bored as a result; he had to battle his way to get to Hedwig when he tried to send the enchanted nappy-bag and sling he'd made for John and Sherlock, because almost every owl in there came rushing towards him with their leg sticking out.

Harry paid the grey barn owl that delivered the morning edition of the *Daily Prophet* . Then he opened it up to read.

"Same as usual," he sighed. " *The Magical Mobile Network is undermining traditional wizarding values… students often distracted during class*… I don't know why I bother to read this anymore."

"It's the only major wizarding world news source out there," Hermione scolded as she read hers. "And we need to know public opinion, since we're running a business."

"And we can't sell if we don't have good PR," said Ron as he read

the paper over Harry's shoulder and surprising them all with his unexpected insight. "But you're right, Harry, this is rubbish. Don't they know we can't even turn our phones on during class?"

"Just a little bit behind the times, aren't they?" Harry quipped, making them all laugh.

There was a pleasant feeling of anticipation in the air that day. Nobody was very attentive in lessons, being much more interested in the arrival that evening of the people from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. When the bell rang early, Hermione, Harry, Ron, and Neville hurried up to Gryffindor Tower, deposited their bags and books as they had been instructed, pulled on their cloaks, and rushed to the Music Room for the final run down.

"We'll be standing here and here, just like we did during the rehearsals," said Miss Jackie, pointing the marked spots on the sheet of paper that had the Hogwarts' grounds drawn out. "Ron and Harry, you'll be operating the Glidecams. Neville and Hermione, you two hold the microphones. Julia, dear, you stay with me and monitor the recording. You all have your charms, yes?"

The five of them held up their respective paper charms. Miss Jackie nodded in approval.

"My brother should be here today, to provide commentary," she said. "Remember, if he asks you anything about the hows of the broadcast, show him the camera and tell him you have no idea how it works."

They nodded. Then together they headed to the entrance hall.

Lestrade felt immensely relieved when he saw the tall and sparse figure of Sherlock Holmes striding towards his crime scene, flaring his poncy charcoal coat behind him as usual. Sherlock had been AWOL for the last two months (hopefully because of Benedict), and the sudden hike in funny crimes that occurred in the interim had made Lestrade and (if they were put under severe torture to confess) his fellow officers at the Scotland Yard miss his acerbic wit.

Sherlock invited himself in, ducking under the crime scene tape and ignoring the other officers on site, also as usual. As he walked over to intercept him, Lestrade noticed the smaller, more compact figure three steps behind Sherlock. It took a few blinks for him to realise it was John.

Baby-mama John didn't look at all that different from pre-baby-mama John, except for the rich chest endowments that was a joy to behold. For a moment Lestrade wondered why John didn't duck under the tape like Sherlock, and if either Sirius or Mrs. Hudson was looking after Benedict (who, at seven weeks, would need his mum constantly).

Then he noticed John had a baby in a sling.

" *You brought your baby with you* ?" Lestrade shouted as he hurried over.

"Yep, Benedict's first crime scene," said John, standing right behind the tape, "I should've brought a camera."

Lestrade did his best to keep himself firmly outraged even as he tried to get a glimpse of Benedict. John and Sherlock, being the reclusive, secretive prats that they were, refused to post baby photos online and didn't even allow the Small Group ladies to take pictures for their private perusal.

All the officers pretended to work as they sneakily inched towards John, who obligingly took Benedict out from the sling so Lestrade could take a better look.

Benedict stared with penetrating, dark-blue eyes and a blank expression. He was still too young to have distinctive features, but he had the same head shape as John and had Sherlock's mouth. Lestrade grinned as he noted the yellow and crusty patches on Benedict's scalp, which was, as Ellen told him, full of fluffy strawberry-blonde hair.

"Cradle cap?" Lestrade asked.

"Yep," said John regretfully. "He loses hair every time he loses a

patch. Mrs. Holmes said Sherlock went through the same thing, and the hair he grew afterwards was dark brown."

Lestrade laughed when Benedict gifted him a gummy smile.

"I think he likes you," said John fondly.

"I don't think you called me to ogle at my son, Lestrade," said Sherlock's cantankerous voice right behind him.

"Maybe I did," Lestrade snapped.

"Considering there is several kilos worth of drugs inside this warehouse, doubtful," Sherlock sneered.

Lestrade sighed and went back to work.

"Third case this week," he said as he pointed at the drug cartel. "Several hundred grand worth of heroin from Thailand, probably, though we haven't ruled out other sources."

"Drugs aren't your area," said Sherlock as he donned latex gloves.

"It isn't, but *this* is," said Lestrade.

He showed Sherlock the shoulder bag that once held the entire cartel inside, thanks to a crudely done Undetectable Expansion Charm.

"… *Wizards*," said Sherlock, staring.

"Yep," said Lestrade. "They're turning into drug runners."

Sherlock glanced at the officers at the scene.

"Magicals and close relatives of magicals."

"Got a whole team of them at the station now, yeah." Lestrade sighed. "The wizard criminals are wising up. They've figured out they can make more money off of Muggles, and that airline security can't detect drugs if you put them in enchanted bags."

"How did you even find this?"

"Jacqueline. She tipped me off that someone contacted someone else about a heroin shipment over the MMN."

"Thank goodness wizards don't have data privacy laws," said Sherlock sardonically.

"Not *yet*," said Lestrade grimly. "Once this case goes public, there will be sooner or later."

Sherlock nodded curtly. "Did Jacqueline tell you who the parties involved are?"

"Yeah, but they were false identities," Lestrade replied. "We tried tracing them through post owls, but no joy. Jacqueline doesn't monitor phone locations, so no joy there either, and wizards don't have identification numbers. I have the dates when they started their subscription, but I doubt it would help. MMN had a huge influx of new customers since the World Cup, and they were part of the wave."

Sherlock clicked his tongue irritably.

"Why did you call me at all? This is beyond my capacity to handle."

Lestrade was shocked to hear this. "Sorry, what?"

"You heard me correctly, I won't say it again," Sherlock spat. "The entire crime is clearly magical . I can't interact with magic."

"I didn't call you for the magic stuff. I'm not supposed to."

"Not that that stopped you," Sherlock quipped.

Lestrade ignored the tone. "Something about this doesn't smell right. We're finding drug cartels, yeah, but there're no signs of other cartels making it to the streets. Heroin doesn't work the same way on wizards as it does Muggles, so it can't be flooding the magical black market. The timing is suspicious, too. Grandpapa Shin's been warning me to keep my eyes peeled since September, and the sheer amount of protective charms he's been loading into my car and jacket tells me he's really worried."

Sherlock looked at him sharply.

"He hasn't told you why he's worried or what he's worried about."

Lestrade shook his head, "Nah."

Sherlock brought his palms together in contemplation as he studied the dusty ground.

"Two men, one shorter than the other," he said, his eyes following an invisible trail. "One formally of the military, one not; they had a confrontation. The military one got the better of the argument, and the murderer from Little Hangleton stormed off. Obvious."

"Where are you pulling this out of? Your arse?" Lestrade exclaimed.

Sherlock flared up, just as he expected.

" *Look* !" Sherlock snapped. "Two sets of feet, clear as day. One is male size eight and other male size ten. Size eight paces erratically, but size ten stands firm until he turns heel right here-" he pointed the spot, "-calmly walks away three steps and vanishes. Conclusion: Size ten knew size eight wouldn't dare do something behind his back; therefore he is the winner of the argument. But why did he turn heel so dramatically? To make a point; putting a particular emphasis on the military past. A military man would know better than to leave a body for the police to find, and one who is as calm under pressure as this one certainly wouldn't, so he isn't the Little Hangleton murderer. Therefore his companion *is* ."

Lestrade folded his arms, "What do you mean by Little Hangleton murderer?"

"Have you heard of Frank Bryce?"

"You know him?!"

" *Of* him, yes," said Sherlock. "An old gardener of a manor house in Little Hangleton; died under the same suspicious circumstances as the Riddle family Bryce was once accused of murdering. The Greater Hangleton police contacted me and asked me to look into the matter. I couldn't provide any solid remarks since Bryce was

obviously murdered by the Killing Curse."

"What else do you know," said Lestrade, sighing.

"The killing curse can earn a wizard a life sentence in Azkaban if caught. Black and Lupin assures me it is not a curse one can use lightly or easily, even if the penalties weren't so severe. It requires more power than most spells and one must *enjoy* the thought of taking away life. What kind of magical are we dealing with, then, if he or she has no qualms of murdering a non-magical cold blood, enjoys it even, when a memory charm would have sufficed to hide whatever it is he or she is doing?"

Lestrade felt a chill. "Someone who has done it before - someone who can do it at all."

"Obviously," said Sherlock. "Lupin and I did some analysis on the number of confirmed and suspected cases of killing curse use. Turns out murders done by the killing curse are astonishingly low, even at the height of Voldemort's power. It was virtually unheard of for the last thirteen years until Frank Bryce and this warehouse, where a middleman drug-dealer was murdered by that curse. If the number of people who can and is willing to use the Killing Curse is so limited, balance of probability is that the murderer of Little Hangleton is the one responsible of the murder here."

Lestrade sighed again. "How do you know there was a body?"

"You *lied*," said Sherlock as he loomed menacingly at Lestrade. "Jacqueline wouldn't actively monitor suspicious communications. No matter what the *Prophet* says, I know she resents the work involved with the Magical Mobile Network. Her sense of integrity would disallow snooping into private conversations. She only provided you the information because you asked. And you were only able to ask because you were contacted about the dead body-which is *definitely* your area-from which you made the magical connection."

Lestrade let out a guttural sigh as Sherlock glowered at him.

"Look, I didn't want to hide anything, okay?" said Lestrade. "And

yes, you're right, there was a body; probably the reason why size ten and eight had their argument. Figures you could see that far without a body. But did you know the Ministry of Magic flagged you and John as high-risk?"

Sherlock's eyes flashed.

"There's a huge debate going on if they should even allow you to keep custody over Harry," said Lestrade in quiet undertones. "I've managed to convince them hell no, not when you've got an older brother who's under top security surveillance, but things don't look good for you two right now. Grandpapa Shin wants you two to lie low for the time being, but I disagree. You're involved in this mess one way or another. So take a good look, get to the bottom of it, but for Christ sake, make it look like you don't know what's going on."

Sherlock wiped his face clear of expression as he stood straight.

"Hiding the body was your only concession to new policy."

"Yeah," said Lestrade, looking down at his feet. "And I'm supposed to find out how much you know; a lot more than they'd ever be comfortable with, obviously."

"Any mind-readers in the Ministry?"

" *Mind-readers?* " Lestrade exclaimed. "The bloody-"

"You obviously haven't heard of them," Sherlock interrupted. "If your father-in-law is a cautious as I think he is, he probably put measures against it on you."

Lestrade felt the multitude of paper charms sewn directly on the inner-lining of his jacket and nodded.

"Who do you work with in the Ministry?" asked Sherlock.

"Arthur Weasley, head of Magical Law Enforcement, senior magic crime investigator equivalent, and the head of the international magic affairs."

"Barty Crouch?"

"I don't even want to know how you know," Lestrade groaned. "But yes, I've been working with Crouch since this involves internationally travelling wizards."

Sherlock smirked. "Keep an eye on him."

"Why?"

"He sacked his house-elf last year over Christmas."

"… Okay, so?"

"Why let go of such a valuable resource?" said Sherlock cryptically. "We employ a house-elf named Dobby part-time and he's invaluable. Harry also rightfully pointed out how suspicious the timing is." He said the last part with a hint of pride.

Lestrade rolled his eyes. "Fine. Anything else?"

"Is there an enclosed, discreet place nearby?"

"I have my car. Why?"

"It's Benedict's feeding time," said Sherlock, checking his watch. Sure enough, they heard a baby screaming from a short distance. Sherlock hurriedly walked away, pulling off his latex gloves and muttering ' *oh hell…* '

Later, when Lestrade gave his report to Minister Fudge and Undersecretary Dolores Umbridge, he was only half-joking when he told them Sherlock *did* come over to investigate the crime scene, but had to leave before he could take a good long look because his wife, who accompanied him, had to go feed their crying baby in the middle of it. To his great astonishment, they accepted this report without question.

"You guys are okay for the time being, I think," Lestrade told John that evening. "Do you want to watch the Triwizard Tournament broadcast at my place?"

"Got a wizard downstairs and it's Benedict's nap-time then, but thanks for offering." John sighed. "Being a mum is really tough."

"Your life is basically over, yeah."

John snorted. "But still worth it."

Ron sighed in relief as the flames of the Goblet of Fire turned red for the third time. Filming and broadcasting the Triwizard tournament turned out to be a lot less fun than he'd thought. For one thing, he had to film while everyone else was enjoying the festivities, including the feast, and it *hurt* to see everyone else eat when he couldn't. Though he was able to enjoy the food later, half of the fun was eating with everyone else. Also, Fred and George, the great prats, kept doing gratuitous shows of enjoyment whenever he turned the camera at their direction.

There were, however, a lot of unexpected bonuses. He was able to get very close to Victor Krum when Durmstrang arrived, for one thing (to no one's surprise, he was selected as champion), and doing close-ups at the Beauxbatons students, the veela girl who got picked as champion in particular, wasn't bad either.

Sparks were showering out of the goblet now. Then a tongue of flame shot high into the air, and from its tip Dumbledore pulled the third piece of parchment.

"The Hogwarts champion," he called, "is Cedric Diggory!"

Every single Hufflepuff jumped to his or her feet, screaming and stamping, as Cedric made his way past them, grinning broadly, and headed off toward the chamber behind the teachers' table. The applause for Cedric went on so long that it was some time before Dumbledore could make himself heard again.

"Excellent!" Dumbledore called happily as at last the tumult died down. "Well, we now have our three champions. I am sure I can count upon all of you, including the remaining students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, to give your champions every ounce of support you can muster. By cheering your champion on, you will contribute in a very real-"

But Dumbledore suddenly stopped speaking, and it was apparent to everybody what had distracted him.

The fire in the goblet had just turned red again. Sparks were flying out of it. A long flame shot suddenly into the air, and…

… Nothing. There was no parchment at the end of the flame.

"Well," said Dumbledore thoughtfully as the goblet's flames died down. "That was unusual…"

Final Notes : Now who expected *that* ? (Certainly not Voldemort :D)

I've combed through HBP to see how memory collecting spells work, and it appears the memories Dumbledore collected from *other* people were gleaned first via legilimency and then collected from his own mind; the memory of a memory, as it were. But I think I've worked out how the memory-harvesting spell would work. Stay tuned.

I might take a month break from fanfic to work on an original novella/ novel. The story is something that's been incubating in my mind for months, and I'd like to flesh it out. I'm also getting a bit weary of writing nothing but ASIM. Writing this chapter was like pulling teeth. I am, however, determined to finish this story, so the break may not happen (it's always harder to pick up after a long break…)

Rude Quickening

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). **This chapter features thoughts of death, and a serious deviation from DH (thus the entire HP-verse).** Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Two: Rude Quickening

Harry travelled to London after wrapping up the Triwizard Tournament champion selection ceremony broadcast. It was nightfall when he arrived via Floo-powder and all was silent and dark inside 221B. He dropped his messenger bag on the floor next to the hearth, threw his jacket over the red armchair, noiselessly made his way down the tiny hall next to the kitchen and quietly drew open the door at the end.

Benedict was napping in his co-sleeper, and John was sleeping only a foot away from him as usual. Harry studied them at the threshold as he listened to his baby brother's quiet snoring. Weariness seemed to wallop him all of a sudden. Harry padded inside and slid next to John. Soon his eyelids began to droop…

He was riding on the back of an eagle owl, soaring through the star-dotted night sky toward an old, ivy-covered house set deep inside a forest. Lower and lower they flew, the wind blowing in Harry's face, until they reached a dark window in the upper story of the house and entered. Now they were flying along a gloomy passageway, to a room at the very end… through the door they went, into a dark room

that had curtains drawn over the windows…

Harry had left the owl's back… he was watching, now, as it fluttered across the room, into a chair with its back to him… There were two dark shapes on the floor beside the chair… both of them were stirring…

One was a huge snake… the other was a man… a short, balding man, a man with watery eyes and a pointed nose… he was wheezing and sobbing on the hearth rug…

"You are in luck, Wormtail," said a cold, high-pitched voice from the depths of the chair in which the owl had landed. "You are very fortunate indeed. Not all is lost. Otherwise your last blunder would've cost you."

"My Lord!" gasped the man on the floor. "My Lord, I am so glad… and so sorry…"

"Nagini," said the cold voice, "you are out of luck. I will not be feeding Wormtail to you, after all… but never mind, never mind… there is still Harry Potter…"

The snake hissed. Harry could see its tongue fluttering.

"Now, Wormtail," said the cold voice, "perhaps one more little reminder why I will not tolerate another blunder from you…"

"My Lord… no… I beg you…"

The tip of a wand emerged from around the back of the chair. It was pointing at Wormtail.

" *Crucio* !" said the cold voice.

Wormtail screamed, screamed as though every nerve in his body were on fire, the screaming filled Harry's ears as the scar on his forehead seared with pain; he was yelling too… Voldemort would hear him, would know he was there…

"Harry! *Harry* !"

Harry opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor of John and Sherlock's bedroom with his hands over his face. His scar was still burning so badly that his eyes were watering. The pain had been real. Sherlock was holding a bawling and flailing Benedict, and John was kneeling next to him, looking terrified.

"What happened?" John said, dark-blue eyes looming over Harry. "What was it?"

"… Another nightmare," Harry whispered. He sat up. He could feel himself shaking. He couldn't stop himself from looking around, into the shadows behind him; Voldemort's voice had sounded so close…

"You were clutching your scar," said John. "You were rolling on the floor, clutching your scar! This isn't just another run-of-the-mill nightmare!"

Harry looked up at John, thinking about what he had seen in the dream… it had been more vivid than the one that had awoken him on his birthday… He ran over the details in his mind, trying to make sure he could remember them… He had heard Voldemort accusing Wormtail of making a blunder… but the owl had brought good news, the blunder wasn't unsalvageable… so Wormtail was not going to be fed to the snake… he, Harry, was going to be fed to it instead…

Sherlock, who had been studying Harry silently this entire time, shifted his hold on Benedict to one arm, pulled out his phone and started texting.

"We need to talk to an expert," he said.

"Dumbledore?" asked John, taking Benedict from him.

"No," said Sherlock, texting two-handed now, "Grandmaster Shin."

"Call Jacqueline, Sirius and Remus, too, then," said John as she comforted Benedict.

The four of them moved to the living room and waited. Sirius and Remus joined them shortly afterwards, Sirius dressed in nothing but a white undershirt and grey pyjama trousers. No one spoke or moved except Benedict, who kept whimpering and squirming in

John's arms, as though he sensed the tense atmosphere and was showing it the only way he knew.

About ten minutes after Sherlock fired off the messages, a rip appeared in the middle of thin air between the armchairs. The rip then opened and Grandmaster Shin stepped out of it, dressed in tasteful tweeds and a pressed shirt. He was followed by Miss Jackie and Dr. Ju, the latter wearing lime-green, hairy slug patterned scrubs that was so small it strained to cover his muscled chest, and orange accented basketball shoes.

"I got your message," said Mr. Shin grumpily, as though he'd just woken up. "Tell me about this dream."

Harry was about to explain, but Miss Jackie cleared her throat.

"Can we view your memory of it?" she asked.

Harry nodded. This was definitely a case where pictures would describe things better than a thousand words.

Harry took out his memory-harvesting paper charm from his messenger bag, planted it on his face and started to recall the dream. He felt something like steam made semi-insubstantial or wind made fluid flow out of his eyes, nose and ears. When he stopped feeling the odd sensation, he handed over the paper charm to Miss Jackie. She took the sheet of paper full of runes and pressed it upon her MMN phone as Harry retook his seat at the sofa.

Immediately the dream of Voldemort started to project out of the phone, starting from the flight upon the owl, in full colour and sound. Sirius clenched his teeth when Wormtail appeared, and Remus turned white and gripped the armrests of his chair tightly. Mr. Shin watched the entire sequence with his hands held behind his back, and his face as expressionless as a carved marble edifice.

When it ended, Dr. Ju knelt down and examined Harry's scar.

"It's my uniform," he explained when Harry eyed his scrubs in askance, which actually had hairy caterpillar patterns that squirmed. "It's small because *someone* hit it with a shrinking charm by mistake.

Allegedly."

Then Dr. Ju frowned.

"There's something in here," he said as he ran his thumb over Harry's scar.

" *What* ?" Sherlock asked sharply.

Dr. Ju shrugged his shoulders. Mr. Shin briefly glanced at Dr. Ju before saying something in a foreign tongue. Dr. Ju replied back, presumably in the same language, as he continued to squint at Harry's scar. There was an upturn at the end of his speech, which suggested he was asking a question. Mr. Shin said something in return, again in the same odd language. While the two men held their incomprehensible exchange, Sherlock looked at John and John shook her head. After clicking his tongue, Sherlock nailed his eyes on Miss Jackie.

"They're talking shop," said Miss Jackie. There was a look of concentration on her face, like she was translating something abstruse. "Something about it doesn't work since it's not a ghost, but an actual soul."

Sherlock let out a frustrated sigh. " *Explain* ."

Mr. Shin's glance flickered downward. A small groove wrinkled on the spot between his long, narrow eyebrows and his mouth formed a grim line.

Dr. Ju looked back at Grandmaster Shin and spoke something at length in the strange foreign tongue.

"Why don't *you* explain it, *doctor* ?" replied Mr. Shin harshly.

"I don't know the whole story," said Dr. Ju. "And what I'm seeing here doesn't make sense."

"But you know what's going on?" demanded Sirius.

"Partially, but that's why it's so confusing. I can't diagnose without all the facts."

"Could you please explain it to us, sir?" Remus asked to Mr. Shin. "We already know something is terribly wrong. If you don't enlighten us, we'll be forced to speculate, and like the doctor said, it would only cause further confusion or worse, rash actions."

Mr. Shin pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed deeply.

"I wish I didn't have this responsibility. *Anyone* else would've done a better job," he said, sounding regretful. Then he spread a hand at the holographic recording of Harry's dream. "What have you noticed about this dream?"

"Perspective is third person limited," said Sherlock promptly. "You never see Voldemort, who is there presumably. Voldemort also has a corporeal body, capable of wielding a wand."

"Correct," said Mr. Shin. "Also, Harry experienced real pain at the end of the dream, yes?"

"Yes," said Harry. "But why just my scar? The last time it did, Voldemort was close by. But he isn't *here*, is he?"

"No," said Mr. Shin quietly. "Doctor, could you explain the scar?"

"Sure," said Dr. Ju before turning to Harry. "Ever wondered why you have a scar at all?"

Harry blinked. It wasn't a thought that ever occurred to him, no.

"Magic people don't scar unless they leave a wound untreated for too long or dark magic is involved," Dr. Ju said. "The spell Voldemort used on you was no doubt one of the darkest curses out there; little wonder it left a mark."

Harry instinctively touched his scar. "Oh…" he muttered.

"Interesting, but not very relevant," said Sherlock irritably. "What are the effects beyond the visible marking? You have clearly implied there is 'something in there'."

Mr. Shin glared at Sherlock with deep annoyance.

"Suppose for one moment that Harry's dream is a vision of real events," he said. "The question then is why he is able to see it. He is not, as far as we know, a seer."

"He has a connection to Voldemort," John answered. "Not in a metaphorical sense, but in a literal, magical sense. Their wands for example: Mr. Ollivander said the phoenix that provided the feather for Harry's wand gave away another feather, and that feather formed the core of LV's wand. Dumbledore also told us LV unintentionally transferred some of his own powers to Harry the night he gave him his scar."

"I see you are well informed; good," said Mr. Shin, nodding. "Now another point: the *modus operandi* of Voldemort was his casual use of Unforgivable Curses: Imperius, Cruciatus and *Avada Kedavra*, the Killing Curse. There are no countercurses for these three, though one may be able to resist the Imperius curse. There is no blocking them or lifting them through a third party. Only one known person has ever survived the Killing Curse, and he is sitting here in this room right now."

Harry felt his face redden as Mr. Shin's dark eyes looked into his own. He could feel everyone else looking around at him too. Harry stared at the floor as though fascinated by it, but not really seeing it at all…

So that was how his parents had died… the green light he could recall, that must have been the Killing Curse… Had they simply seen the flash of green light before life was wiped from their bodies?

Harry had been picturing his parents' deaths over and over again for four years now, ever since he'd found out they had been murdered, ever since he'd found out what had happened that night: Wormtail had betrayed his birth parents' whereabouts to Voldemort, who had come to find them at their cottage. How Voldemort had killed Harry's father first. How James Potter had tried to hold him off, while he shouted at his wife to take Harry and run… Voldemort had advanced on Lily Potter, told her to move aside so that he could kill Harry… how she had begged him to kill her instead, refused to stop shielding her son… and so Voldemort had murdered her too, before turning his wand on Harry…

Harry knew these details because he had heard his parents' voices when he had fought the dementors last year- for that was the terrible power of the dementors: to force their victims to relive the worst memories of their lives, and drown, powerless, in their own despair…

Mr. Shin was speaking again, from a great distance, it seemed to Harry. With a massive effort, he pulled himself back to the present and listened to what Mr. Shin was saying:

"If there is no countercurse and no way of blocking it, how did Harry survive? Even if we assume it deflected off of him somehow, there is a more troubling question still: how did *Voldemort* survive? It is highly doubtful he was expecting something of the sort would happen. Therefore he would have no defences against his own Killing Curse. How then did he manage to survive as a living spectre, capable of regaining a body? And how did the Killing Curse in effect create a connection between him and Harry?"

Light dawned on Dr. Ju's eyes.

"He must have left a bit of *himself* in Harry the day he tried to kill him," said Dr. Ju. "One of the penalties- *consequences* - of wilful, wanton murder is the shredding of your own soul. Voldemort murdered *hundreds* with the Killing Curse. His soul would've been mutilated beyond recognition. When the Killing Curse rebounded upon him, his soul blasted into pieces, the fragments scattered everywhere and one attached itself to the only living thing in the vicinity: Harry."

Mr. Shin nodded tersely while Sirius and Remus gasped and paled respectively.

"It's not an unknown phenomenon," Dr. Ju explained. "There are several documented cases in Japan of wizards who committed multiple murders leaving behind soul fragments when they failed to murder their last victim and got themselves killed instead. But for these cases, the soul fragment didn't linger long and eventually left in the manner of all dead. The maximum window of lingering was forty-nine days. But somehow, Voldemort's soul fragment is staying far beyond that."

"So your initial confusion lay in the fact there is no clear way Harry could have gained a soul fragment when no mass-murderers were killed in his vicinity for the last forty-nine days," said Sherlock.

Dr. Ju nodded.

There was a short pause.

"… This can mean only one thing," said Miss Jackie slowly, a look of horror rising up on her pallid face. "You-Know-Who *intended* to leave behind a soul fragment. That is why his soul fragment lingered beyond forty-nine days. The soul fragment is in effect *anchoring* You-Know-Who to this world. Therefore You-Know-Who will continue to live so long as the soul fragment continues to exist. The only way to get rid of him, then, is to kill the soul fragment. But the only way to kill a soul-"

"-is destroying the vessel," said Mr. Shin tonelessly.

The silence that met this announcement was complete.

For a long time Harry just sat there, staring at his feet. He was stunned. He felt numb. He was surely dreaming. He had not heard correctly.

At some point he noticed there was an argument going on in the living room. Harry couldn't make out the words. There was a buzzing noise in his ears and a grey mist swirled in front of his eyes. When he blinked it all back, he felt Miss Jackie's skinny arms around him, and Sirius gripping his shoulder hard. He also heard Sherlock shouting over Benedict's wailing and Mr. Shin-perpetually expressionless and saturnine Mr. Shin-was shouting right back, his face twisted in anger.

" *What were you planning to do?* " Sherlock snarled. "You said it yourself: when you discover a soul wand, you destroy them! Was that your agenda?!"

"I'm a father myself!" Mr. Shin thundered. "Do you think I would kill Jacqueline even if she were a soul wand?"

"How long were you planning to hide this, then? You had all the necessary data since Harry was *second year* ! Were you going to tell us at all?!"

"I only had enough information to make *guesses*… nothing solid until tonight!"

"Oh, that's lovely, that's just *fine* !" snapped Sherlock sarcastically. "And I suppose you wanted to wait until the 'opportune time and person' appeared… how very cautious!"

"I wonder how you operate in this world at all, if this is the way you treat those who are trying to help you," said Mr. Shin in quiet fury. "Need I remind it was *you* who asked me to come here? Perhaps I should withdraw all support. You have no business interfering with our world, after all."

" *Please*, you can't even if you wanted to-"

"Do you want to see me try?" said Mr. Shin, his eyes burning like twin black holes. "I'm not a kind man, Mr. Holmes. I do not have a reputation for mercilessness for nothing."

Dr. Ju, who was flicking his eyes between the fighting pair, opened his mouth: "Uh-"

"Shut up!" snarled Sherlock before he could say anything.

" *Silence* !" snapped Mr. Shin almost at the same time.

Dr. Ju blinked and looked down.

" *Stop it* !" said Miss Jackie sharply. "Appa, this is no way to act to people, especially now! And Sherlock, what are you doing to your family?!"

Mr. Shin and Sherlock stopped at once. Benedict continued to cry pitifully and piercingly. John clutched him close to her chest, patting his back, but the gesture looked mechanical, not soothing. Every line and wrinkle on John's face was etched with shock and disbelief.

At length Benedict tired himself of crying, and started hiccoughing.

No one spoke even after he quieted down.

A long silence followed.

"There's… really no other way?" John whispered.

"That I know of," said Mr. Shin, closing his eyes and turning his face away.

John shook her head in denial. " *No*…"

"Dumbledore and I have been searching high and low for alternatives since we've guessed at the truth," said Mr. Shin monotonously. "Dumbledore postulated that we could exploit the inherent instability of a soul fragment. It is not natural for a soul to exist in pieces, after all. Also, the only reason why a wizard's soul can *linger* as a fragment is *magic* . If that magic can be removed, perhaps the soul fragment will not be able to stay."

"John has the ability to drain magic," said Sherlock at once. "Why-no, we're already using that option."

"Correct," said Mr. Shin. "I believe Dumbledore asked if you had any long-kept personal items before Harry left for Hogwarts, Dr. Watson."

"… My dog-tags," breathed John. "Harry, you're wearing it, right?"

Harry nodded. He'd never taken it off since Dumbledore told him not to, the day before he boarded the Hogwarts Express. He had forgotten about it completely, actually, only vaguely noting it when he took showers.

"So Dumbledore has known this since Harry was first year?" asked Sherlock sharply.

"Possibly, but I doubt it," said Mr. Shin. "I know Dumbledore started guessing at the soul fragment's existence when Voldemort's old diary was discovered. The tags had a secondary, unexpected effect of stopping the soul fragment's parasitic growth, but it didn't remove its magic entirely. Now, as Voldemort grows more powerful, the soul fragment strengthened correspondingly and is now overwhelming

the tag's draining effects. Wasn't this dream more vivid than the one you had in the summer?"

"How did you know that?" said Harry wonderingly.

"You were thinking about it very loudly," said Mr. Shin. Then he sighed. "We found only one other option for magic removal, but it is unfeasible. There is an ancient spell of sorts in my old country called *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* . It reputedly can eliminate all magic exposed to its sphere of influence. I've looked for the two men who had the ability to do it, but they are both dead."

"Why can't you do it?" asked Sherlock.

"Just because people call me 'Grandmaster' doesn't mean I'm capable of learning *all* magic," snapped Mr. Shin. "Magic people here are devoted to what my country calls *Bu-ga* and *Ma-ga* : spells and enchantments. The only reason why I am able to handle western magic at all is because I am technically *paksu mudang*, thus was seeped in Bu-ga, Ma-ga and Mu-ga. I can't touch anything Dao-ga (道), which *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* falls into, because my magic is no longer compatible with it."

"He won't be able to do it now even if he *can* handle Dao-ga," Miss Jackie muttered. "Advanced Dao-ga spells only works for people who never knew anyone in the family way."

Harry couldn't help but gape open-mouthed at the notion.

"Yes, there's that too," Mr. Shin grumbled. "Han Bin and Doe Hae, the two men I mentioned before, were the last true practitioners of Dao-ga in my country. They rarely took in pupils, and very few were willing to go submit to the required training. I heard a rumour one boy managed to learn all their skills, but I doubt anyone would've survived even a month of Han Bin's noxious presence and Doe Hae's temper. If there are practitioners in other countries, I don't know them."

"Thus snap went your final lead," said Sherlock.

There was stark silence.

"I-" said Dr. Ju, raising his hand.

" *WHAT* ?" Mr. Shin and Sherlock snapped.

"… Just wanted to let you know," said Dr. Ju, wincing, "that I could do it."

Mr. Shin blinked at him in astonishment. " *How* ?" he demanded.

"I'm the idiot who survived six years of Han Bin and Doe Hae," Dr. Ju explained. "And I still wear virgin pants."

All the younger people gaped at him. Mr. Shin, on the other hand, narrowed his eyes to slits.

"Prove it," he hissed.

Dr. Ju sighed tiredly. Then he put his hand into his pocket, pulled out a leather case, carefully removed the scalpel tucked inside, and held it in his hand.

Something dark and cold gathered around the blade, enveloping it. It was as though the very air surrounding the scalpel had turned into steel, sharpening it further.

"… Kumki [劍氣 (검기)]," said Mr. Shin in wonderment. "I haven't seen it since Master Lee passed away."

Dr. Ju, who was sweating profusely, gave Mr. Shin a pleading look. "Are you done, sir? I can't hold this up much longer. I'm not as fit as I used to be."

Mr. Shin said nothing and kept studying the blade. Harry side-eyed Dr. Ju's muscled torso in meantime, feeling a hint of disgust. He saw corresponding emotions on Sirius.

Everyone gasped when Mr. Shin suddenly conjured a thick, iron rod and threw it at Dr. Ju. Dr. Ju sliced the rod in half with his scalpel, and the two divided pieces clattered to the ground. Sherlock dove at them and showed everyone the cut side. It was miraculously clean- no nicks or unevenness.

"I'm surprised one as young as you can do it," Mr. Shin remarked as Dr. Ju withdrew the Kumki and tucked his scalpel back into its case. "Kumki is supposed to take sixty years of magic cultivation. Did you receive your ne-gong (內功) from someone else?"

"Ah, no. Back when I was a resentful and rebellious teenager, I wanted to prove Han Bin wrong in any way possible so I chose to debunk the magic cultivation myth," Dr. Ju started scratching his neck. "I don't often get feelings of accomplishment, but when I proved cardiovascular endurance is the *real* driving force behind magic cultivation, and the reason why it took so long for ancient wizards to build their magic reserves to a useable point is the highly deficient nature of a typical Dao-ga wizard's diet, well…" he grinned evilly, "… It felt good."

Mr. Shin smirked. "I would've liked to have seen his face when you did."

"I was too late," said Dr. Ju ruefully. "I had to build up my stamina to the point I could finish two Ironmans back to back before I could properly demonstrate. He was already dead by then."

"What's an Ironman?" asked Sirius, while John slumped back in apparent exhaustion and Miss Jackie wilted against Harry as though all her strength went out of her.

"A triathlon competition where you swim 2.4-miles, bicycle 112-miles and run 26.2-miles in that order and without a break," said Dr. Ju.

Sirius sputtered in disbelief. "People actually do that? *Why* ? What for?"

"Who knows?" said John as she flung a hand in a tossing-backwards gesture.

"Whatever the case may be, this is an unexpected piece of good news," said Mr. Shin. "That you can produce Kumki and sustain it means you already have the magic reserves necessary to perform *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* . I presume you know the theory behind it at least."

"I remember all of the instructions," Dr. Ju confirmed. Then a smile that didn't reach his eyes started to spread across his face. "I can't forget them even though I *want* to. Just when I think I've finally put them out of my head, Han Bin shows up in my dreams and pounds it back into my skull…"

"The only thing that worries me, then, is that you will be on your own," said Mr. Shin, blithely ignoring the latter mutterings. "Dao-ga is one of the most volatile magic practices. If you lose control of the magic you've cultivated, at this magnitude, death is all but certain."

"I'm ready to die," said Dr. Ju firmly. "Harry, though, I don't think he is. Are you?"

Harry froze as Dr. Ju locked his sharp tawny eyes on Harry's.

"Are you ready to die?" Dr. Ju asked again quietly.

Harry couldn't speak. Was he ready to die? How could he be? How could *anyone* be? And why was Dr. Ju asking this question all of a sudden?

"You *have* to be ready to die," said Dr. Ju seriously. "Every single person living on this earth is destined to a grave. It's only a matter of *when* and *how* . So you *need* to be prepared. Even if the spell works and LV stops being a threat, your end will be the same."

"Oi, why are you…" Sirius started.

"I'm saying this because the spell may not work the way you want," said Dr. Ju relentlessly. "You want *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* to work like some sort of solar flare that destroys all electronics, only magic. But the spell's true purpose is banishing all illusion. Magic removal is only a side-effect because the spell assumes the world- matter and magic- is an illusion, and once the illusion is removed, everything returns to *mu* -nothingness. Now I don't know about you, but I think the premise is entirely wrong."

"Why?" asked Mr. Shin.

" *Because matter* is *real!* " said Dr. Ju passionately. "Even the most ardent Taoist instinctively knows it's real since he looks both ways

before crossing the street - it's either the bus or him, not both of them, which should be the case if matter is nothing but an illusion. Transfiguration as a field cannot exist if matter isn't really real. Don't you see the very foundation of the spell is *bunk* ? Are you still willing to stake your life on it, knowing this?"

No one replied for a long time.

"But the spell *has* been performed successfully before," said Mr. Shin slowly. "As recently as the nineteen-nineties, I know this for certain. There must be a kernel of truth to the spell if this is so."

"A kernel, of course there is a kernel," said Dr. Ju hollowly. "But what is that kernel? Here, let me tell you the instructions for performing *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* . I'll buy you a car if you can make sense of it: *there is no you or me or anything else but the motionless nothingness of the heart* ."

"… What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Sirius exclaimed.

"Anything; nothing; it's all up to your own interpretation," Dr. Ju rolled his eyes. "In my opinion, anyone who could do it before was able to do it *in spite of* the instructions. Or maybe it was pure accident. Who knows; I know *I* had to forget everything Han Bin and Doe Hae told me and figure out how to get the desired outcome based on what I know about fundamental magic theory."

"I'm shocked that you're still alive," Mr. Shin muttered.

"I'm too terminally dumb to die," said Dr. Ju.

"Now you sound like Greg," sighed Mr. Shin. "Jacqueline, I can see from the look on your face that you have an idea."

"Well, the notion of a magic equivalent of a coronal mass ejection intrigued me-" said Miss Jackie.

"Of course it did," said Mr. Shin, waving a hand and interrupting. "If you have to reconstruct the spell from ground up, doctor, I might as well supervise. The magic cap shouldn't be a problem if you really abstained from women, and that's always a problem with wizards attempting Dao-ga these days-"

"Magic cap?" John asked.

Miss Jackie turned red as she stuttered an explanation: "Uh, well, you see, the amount of magic one can cultivate stops growing the moment a wizard knows-"

"Call it for what it is, Jacqueline," said Mr. Shin brusquely. "The moment a wizard has *sex* his magic reserves stops growing. Hence the magic cap. It's the reason why wizards of old often remained celibate. No one knows this anymore. They've stopped teaching it in the sixties and seventies…"

"I thought it was a myth," Sirius protested.

"The only reason why people think it is a myth is because this magic cap only applies to men. Women experience better growth after they become mothers, and then experience a sharp decline after menopause."

"Oh," said Remus, blinking. "Is that why you, um…"

"No," said Dr. Ju. "I vowed to only have sex with my wife when I became Christian at age eleven."

"You don't have a wife."

"Nope."

"What kind of rare, exotic temporal species are you?" asked Mr. Shin in mild exasperation.

"God knows. But I can tell you he was stubborn to the point of stupid on this," said John. "We had the most blazing rows over it back in the day."

"Why must you say that in front of your husband and children?" groaned Dr. Ju, covering his face.

"Because establishing your ability to accomplish this spell is of the utmost importance right now," drawled Sherlock. "Surely you know that."

"Yes, but like I said before, even if I have all the prerequisites, the spell may not work the way you want it to," said Dr. Ju tiredly. "Even if you just assume the spell's worldview, the internal logic of the spell is full of contradictions; if the spell dispels all illusion, which includes matter, it would mean the body of the spell-caster would vanish in its wake, too, and that violates the caster existence principle."

"A fully-formed spell, with very few exceptions, will only persist as long as the wizard or witch who cast the spell lives," Remus muttered.

"And a human soul that doesn't have a body is dead," said Dr. Ju flatly. "I'm sorry, but that's how it is."

Sherlock, remarkably, had nothing to say about that. Dr. Ju, who didn't know how remarkable this was, let out a very long-drawn sigh.

"It's late," he said. "Hailey, you and your kids need sleep. Try not to worry too much. I promise I'll do my best to make this spell work."

"You were always so serious about your promises," said John wryly. "Please don't kill yourself trying."

"I can't promise you that," said Dr. Ju grimly. Then he flicked his glance at Miss Jackie.

Their eyes locked for a long second.

"You're doing the right thing," Miss Jackie said quietly after the tense moment. "Let me help you."

Dr. Ju cast his glance downward and said nothing.

Mr. Shin pursed his lips. "Jacqueline…"

"I'm going to help, Appa," said Miss Jackie severely, looking her father square in the face.

Mr. Shin's shoulders sagged. "… Fine."

Their guests prepared to leave after this. Dr. Ju did a vertical slicing motion with his right forefinger, which created a very narrow elliptical

hole that stretched from ceiling to floor. He gently pried the rip in space open, cast one look behind his back and then stepped into the rip. The rip vanished the moment he walked through.

"A true master of portals," said Mr. Shin, sounding impressed. "I'm starting to think we have a fighting chance."

Then he grasped at the air and roughly tore open a hole shaped like an oval. Miss Jackie followed him through the hole after bidding everyone good night. As soon as they left, Sherlock shot out of the living room and shut the door behind him.

There was a lingering silence.

"Well," said Remus bracingly. "It wasn't the best news to get in the middle of the night, but it looks like things are under control."

"I am so glad Grandmaster Shin is on our side," said Sirius fervently, "Scary as hell, but damn reliable."

"And more willing to communicate, unlike some people," said John.

Harry said nothing. He knew John, Sirius and Remus were saying these things because the worst case scenario was too terrifying to contemplate.

"You two can go down," said John, nodding at Sirius and Remus. "Benedict is delirious and I have no idea how long it's going to take him to fall asleep."

"Okay," said Remus. He clapped Harry's back. "Don't worry, Harry. Have a good sleep."

"Yeah, good night," said Sirius, squeezing his shoulder.

They trooped out.

Once John and Harry could no longer hear the sound of their footsteps, John inched towards Harry, and Harry buried his face into the mended shoulder.

"Worst-case scenario makes you wish you're an optimist, doesn't

it?" said John after a while.

Harry nodded into the shoulder. He, like John, had experienced too many hardships to blindly assume things would work out. Hard work and good intentions didn't guarantee success; the world was fuzzy and broken like that. However, facing the worst-case scenario was more than his brain could handle. In fact, he couldn't go beyond the fatal announcement:

You-Know-Who will continue to live so long as the soul fragment continues to exist. The only way to get rid of him, then, is to kill the soul fragment. But the only way to kill a soul is destroying the vessel.

Would he, Harry, be able to die willingly if his life was the only obstacle between Lord Voldemort's return and his complete vanquish? If Voldemort returned again despite everyone's efforts and there was no other choice, would he be willing to die?

Truthfully, he'd rather die than let Voldemort return to full power, and thus threaten the lives of John, Benedict, Sherlock and everyone else. He'd rather die courageously, and the idea of eking out a pathetic, cowardly existence like Pettigrew made him want to hurl. In this sense, yes, he was more than willing.

But…

He wanted to see Benedict grow up. He wanted to finish his Hogwarts education and travel the world. He wanted to discover a cure for lycanthropy, so the werewolf curse would be a thing of the past. He wanted to start his own family and inflict the horrors of grandchildren on Sherlock. He wanted to do so many things… but what use were dreams for someone who was going to die?

Harry pressed his face harder against John's shoulder. Death was old news. He knew he was going to die one day. It was a truth as close to his skin as the clothes he wore when he was younger, right after the Surrey Zoo bombing. It had made him eager- desperate- to experience the good things in life before it all ended. But somewhere along the way he had forgotten this truth, and merely assumed he would have another tomorrow, another day after, to live. How did he

forget? Now he was used to the idea of indefinite tomorrows, and the thought his tomorrows were numbered was almost too much for him to bear.

I don't want to die.

John lifted her arm and wrapped it around Harry.

"Did I ever tell you what I was like right after Afghanistan?"

Harry shook his head.

"My sleeping syndrome was at its worst then," said John. "I'd spend days sleeping, not knowing when it started or when it would end. By the time I met Mike, I was convinced one day I was going to fall asleep and never wake up."

Harry gripped at John's sleeve; it was a secret worry of his, too.

"That changed me," John whispered. "If I met Sherlock before, I would've been just like Donovan. But by the time I did meet him, I didn't care about much. Why should I care about so-and-so if tomorrow I'm going to die? The dead don't care about the living. I basically lived like I was already dead. And that was one of the best things that ever happened to me."

Harry looked up in astonishment. John's eyes were crinkled into a smile.

"I wouldn't have thought about the important questions in life if I wasn't a deadman walking. I soon realised death is only scary if it *is* the full stop to life, and loss is only unbearable if there is no hope for restoration. And if there is a beyond and that beyond is good, you have no reason to fear death."

Harry stared.

"Finding I could answer yes on both points made all the difference in the world," John concluded.

Final Notes : I intended to take that month break, but the contents of this chapter hit me like lightning this past Sunday. I think it was the culmination of the past three weeks, during which I've heard the news of/witnessed the death of five people, the first someone I saw growing up since the person was a ten-year-old, and last a seven month old baby, who was murdered. The wails of anguish of the first person's mother still rings in my ears. It reminded me death and life is too serious a matter to treat with mere sentiment and wishful thinking.

I think I unearthed all the random useless knowledge I gleaned from wasting my youth watching Martial Art movies and reading up old warrior legends. The movies these days don't show it, but all the older material I read always emphasized the hero 'never known a woman', or 'above passion/craving'. Some of them outright stated sex weakens them. I didn't think much about it at all until now…

A Bucket of First Tasks

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Three: A Bucket of First Tasks

"Harry-what *happened* ?"

Harry stared at Ron, Neville and Hermione, whom he met inside the Gryffindor common room, thinking he must look exceptionally bad to elicit that remark from Ron.

Harry didn't fall asleep until daybreak. When he woke up, he lay in bed for a long time, wondering why it felt like his joints had turned to slime and his stomach was trying to expel the decomposing boa constrictor festering within. Once he remembered the reason, Harry did his best not to get sick, dressed and paced around inside his bedroom, brooding over last night's revelations. He only stopped when John knocked on his door so they could attend service at their parish in South East Peckham. After a deeply inattentive hour and a half, John told Harry on their way back to Baker Street that he should tell his friends the news.

"Why?"

"They're going to know something is up," John said. "They won't leave you alone until you tell them."

Hermione would certainly nag until he capitulated, Harry thought.

"But they're going to worry," he muttered.

"They're going to worry *either way*," John pointed out. "If they must worry, let them worry for the right reason."

Harry kept imagining Hermione's shrill and panicky voice and Ron and Neville's dumbfounded expressions as he and Remus returned to Hogwarts. Before Harry could head back to the Gryffindor tower, Remus paused for a second, squeezed his shoulders gently and assured him: "You'll be fine; don't let it get to you." Harry nodded, thinking he wished he could believe it.

"Harry?" said Ron's voice uncertainly.

Harry blinked back to reality. He vaguely noted the common room was unusually empty.

"Where is everyone?" he asked.

"Dinner!" said Ron, watching Harry closely. "We were going to go when you came. Should we go now?"

"You can go, I'm okay."

Harry slumped into a chair next to the fire. Crookshanks was spread out in front of the fire like a large, ginger rug.

"You really don't look well, you know," Hermione said, peering anxiously into his face.

"And don't say you're fine, because you're obviously not," said Neville when Harry opened his mouth.

Harry closed his mouth and looked at them. Then he covered his eyes because he felt like tearing up. He had to tell the news to these three and Julia sooner or later. He would have to, least his death leave them traumatized and asking themselves: why, why, *why* ?

"You're right, I'm not okay," Harry mumbled.

"What happened?" asked Hermione urgently.

Harry worked on his jaw. He couldn't get the words out; they just stuck to his throat.

"… I might have to die," he finally choked.

Then he told them all about Voldemort's soul fragment embedded in his scar and everything Grandmaster Shin and Dr. Ju told him about it while he kept his eyes covered. No one said anything after he finished speaking. Curious, Harry peered through his fingers.

Ron, Neville and Hermione's expressions were almost exactly as Harry had imagined them back in 221B. Hermione and Neville looked absolutely horrified and Ron simply looked dumbstruck. Harry waited a bit to see what kind of reference books Hermione would suggest and what kind of people she would advise him to talk to, but apparently the news was too horrible for her to think about such things.

Ron was the first person who spoke.

"But - how does Grandmaster Shin know this? I mean - how can he *know* ?"

"I'm not sure exactly, but Dr. Ju sensed the fragment the moment he touched my scar. I guess he sensed it too," Harry said quietly. "And it's happened before, soul fragments of murderers staying behind on other people, I mean. Only those soul fragments didn't stick around very long."

"Maybe that'll happen," said Ron hopefully.

"Thirteen years sounds like an awfully long time for a dead soul fragment to stick around if it's supposed to leave on its own," said Hermione desperately. "Does Professor Dumbledore know? He ought to know!"

"He already knows. He just didn't tell me," Harry muttered. "I guess he couldn't bring himself to, when there isn't a solution that doesn't involve me dying."

There was a silence in which Ron fidgeted absentmindedly in his seat.

"Does Grandmaster Shin have any ideas?" asked Neville.

"He mentioned some kind of spell that can remove all magic. Since the thing that's tying LV's soul fragment to me is *magic*, he reckons if we remove that magic, it'll go away."

"Brilliant!" said Ron, his expression clearing. "So there *is* an alternative! Why d'you say you need to die, then?"

"The spell may not *work*," said Hermione, in an I-can't-believe-you're-this-stupid sort of voice. "The spell sounds self-contradictory… I mean, getting rid of magic using magic? That doesn't sound right."

"Dr. Ju's words almost exactly," said Harry dully. "Even if you ignore the contradiction, he'll have to remake the spell because the old instructions don't make any sense. Mr. Shin and Miss Jackie are going to help him."

"Wouldn't they be able to figure it out, then, if Grandmaster Shin and Miss Jackie are helping?" asked Neville.

"Maybe, but that's only *half* of the problem. Mr. Shin said Dr. Ju would *die* if he lost control of his magic while trying to do the spell." Harry sighed. "I guess I could always ask a dementor to suck it out for me…"

"I don't think that would work, Harry," said Hermione seriously. "I doubt you can control a dementor like that, and why would they bother with a tiny soul fragment when they can go after a whole one?"

"Hermione, I was only joking," said Harry wearily.

"Well it wasn't very funny," said Hermione before saying very fast: "Listen, the best wizards in the world are handling the problem. If they can't solve it, no one can. We need to trust them. In the meantime, we should familiarize ourselves with the problem as much as possible…"

She went on about the library search they should (inevitably) conduct. Ron and Neville just nodded dumbly, unable or unwilling to contradict her. Harry felt too tired to feel exasperated. None of them seem to understand at all, but then, why would they? They didn't have death hanging over their heads… they didn't have a reason to think they might die tomorrow, a month later, whenever, if things didn't work out… they didn't know death can sneak up on you when you least expected it…

"Let's go downstairs for dinner," said Ron, interrupting. "Come on, there's no point worrying about it. And being hungry just makes you *more* miserable."

Hermione gave him a reproachful look. " *Ron*…"

"Yeah, let's go," said Harry, getting up suddenly. "Hang on; I'll put my stuff in the dorm."

Harry felt the eyes of Ron, Hermione and Neville follow him all the way up the boys' dormitory entrance.

They were still watching him nervously when Harry came back. Nobody spoke on their way downstairs until they encountered a group of sixth-year girls crowding around Cedric Diggory, begging him to sign their school bags.

"Don't they have better things to do?" growled Ron, throwing a contemptuous look at the simpering girls as they walked past.

Harry felt a little better after he said that.

They found Julia at the mostly empty Gryffindor table in the Great Hall, where she was talking to Ginny. Harry could tell from the sombre, inscrutable look on her face that she knew. Harry didn't know if he was grateful that he didn't have to talk about the news again or feel something else at Miss Jackie/Mr. Shin for spilling the beans.

"Hi, Harry, what do you need?" Julia said as he sat down.

"A way to make a dementor take a peck at my forehead without giving me mouth-to-mouth," Harry replied.

"Maybe I should ask grandpa to give them the Eyebrow. Perhaps they'll be too scared to do anything but that."

Harry smiled briefly as he pictured Grandmaster Shin barking orders at a cowering dementor.

"If only," he said wistfully.

Harry just watched his friends eat because he felt too queasy in the stomach. Neville kept flickering worried glances at him, and Hermione tried to entice him to eat by ladling different kinds of food on his plate. Harry just pushed the food around with his fork, unwilling to risk opening his mouth. He wanted to stop thinking about death, but it kept coming back to him, like vultures circling around a carcass…

"Don't wallow," said someone sharply.

Harry looked up, wondering who said that. Neville was choking and coughing, Hermione was glancing to her side, Julia was blinking, eyebrows raised, and Ron was goggling at Ginny with a large forkful of shepherd's pie protruding out of his mouth. Ginny flushed red when she noticed Harry's stare, but this time, she looked steadily back.

"You shouldn't wallow," said Ginny again, looking rather fierce. "Because that's what he wants-for you to wallow in self-pity so he can laugh at how weak you are. Don't let him."

"He?" asked Harry stupidly.

"You-Know-Who," said Ginny, her jaw set in a stubborn way that strongly reminded Harry of her brother George. "You're only this down when You-Know-Who is involved. Well, I may not have had to deal with him as often as you did, but I know what he's like."

"You do?"

"Of course! You know what happened to me two years ago!"

Harry couldn't believe he forgot about that. "… Yes. Sorry."

Then he sat straighter, his feelings taking a slight upturn now that he started to see, if only dimly, what he should do henceforth. He didn't want Voldemort to win. Therefore he shouldn't wallow in despair, which would only make it easier for Voldemort to have his way. Harry also remembered wondering about Ginny turning perfectly happy again after she was un-petrified and Tom Riddle's diary was destroyed once and for all. Perhaps it wasn't so much that she was *actually* happy as it was her determination to *be* happy so she wouldn't give Tom Riddle, a.k.a. Lord Voldemort, the honour of scoring any kind of lasting victory.

Don't give anything the honour of ruining your life…

"Thank you, I really needed that reminder," said Harry honestly.

Ginny turned flaming-scarlet as she looked down.

Harry didn't get to see her recover because Professor McGonagall came over to the table the next moment, telling Harry Professor Dumbledore wished to see him in his office.

"A little something on the way, Potter," she said, handing over a squat little brown jar with a white screw top.

Harry stuffed the jar into his pocket and trudged all the way to the stone gargoyle that guarded the entrance to the Headmaster's office. Once there, he realised he didn't know the password.

"Sherbet lemon?" he tried tentatively.

The gargoyle did not move.

"Okay," said Harry, staring at it, "Pear Drop. Er-Licorice Wand. Fizzing Whizbee. Drooble's Best Blowing Gum. Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans… oh no, he doesn't like them, does he?… oh just open, can't you?" he said angrily. "I'm supposed to meet him here!"

The gargoyle remained immovable.

Harry kicked it, achieving nothing but an excruciating pain in his big toe.

"Chocolate Frog!" he yelled angrily, standing on one leg. "Sugar Quill! Cockroach Cluster!"

The gargoyle sprang to life and jumped aside. Harry blinked.

"Cockroach Cluster?" he said, amazed. "I was only joking…"

He hurried through the gap in the walls and stepped onto the foot of a spiral stone staircase, which moved slowly upward as the doors closed behind him, taking him up to a polished oak door with a brass door knocker. On his way up, Harry opened the jar Professor McGonagall gave him and immediately felt immensely stupid because several Cockroach Clusters were nestled inside; he couldn't believe he missed such an obvious hint.

Harry stood before the oak doors. He could hear voices from inside the office, but they were too soft to make out. He hesitated a bit before rapping the brass knocker.

"Enter," said Dumbledore's voice.

Harry pushed the door open. He had been inside Dumbledore's office once before; it was a very beautiful, circular room, lined with pictures of previous headmasters and headmistresses of Hogwarts, all of whom were fast asleep, their chests rising and falling gently.

Professor Dumbledore was the only person inside the office. The other occupant was Fawkes, Professor Dumbledore's phoenix, and he was standing on his golden perch beside the door. The size of a swan, with magnificent scarlet-and-gold plumage, he swished his long tail and blinked benignly at Harry.

"Hello, Professor. Hello, Fawkes," said Harry.

"Good evening, Harry," said Dumbledore. "Do come in and sit down."

Harry sat, feeling unaccountably nervous.

"First of all, I would like to apologise," said Dumbledore, hands clasped as though in prayer. "It is clear to me now that I have committed the folly that plagues so many old men such as I:

preventing youth from knowing the terrible truths as long as possible, so they may remain ignorantly happy."

The tight knot in Harry's chest seemed to unclench a little.

"I don't think I would've been able to say anything if I were in your shoes, Professor," he mumbled.

"You are too kind," said Dumbledore sadly. "But now you know. It is now imperative that you know the other known facts. As young as you are, you *must* understand the depths of the terrible truth, as much as you are able, for only then you will know what to do."

Harry nodded.

"I had a theory-just a theory, Harry, nothing more-that Lord Voldemort may have torn his soul to fragments and stored them in different objects when his old diary resurfaced," Dumbledore began. "It may not have struck you as strange, Harry, but Tom Riddle's diary had capabilities far beyond a typical memory-storing device. It was able to think for itself, act independently and control its owners through possession. No mere memory would ever be able to do such things. It was, in fact, acting eerily like a *person* … or a soul wand 'of sorts,' as Grandmaster Shin no doubt told you."

Harry nodded again.

"Grandmaster Shin confirmed the worst possible variation of my theory when he told me that he had detected a soul fragment in your scar," Dumbledore continued. "As curious as I was on how he was able to sense the soul fragment, I had no doubt he was telling the truth when he, by lucky chance, retrieved an object that served as a receptacle for another soul fragment. As the object was retrieved from one of Voldemort's most loyal followers' possessions, I have little doubt the soul fragment was Voldemort's."

Harry sat there, horror-struck. There were *more* ? Not just Tom Riddle's Diary, but *another* one?

"The object has since been destroyed," said Dumbledore calmly. "But its existence leads to a troubling thought: there may be other

objects out there, containing and protecting Voldemort's soul fragments. Unfortunately, we do not know what they are and we do not know for sure how many of them are out there."

"But if we don't find them and destroy them, Voldemort won't…" Harry faltered, unable to continue.

"As long as they exist, Voldemort cannot die," Dumbledore confirmed.

A heavy silence fell in the office. Harry dimly noted many of the portraits of the old headmasters and headmistresses were awake and listening raptly; one corpulent, red-nosed wizard actually took out his ear-trumpet to better hear.

"Our ultimate course of action must be clear now," Dumbledore resumed.

"We need to find Voldemort's soul fragments and destroy them," said Harry; he felt a leaden sense of panic in the pit of his stomach as he considered the prospects. "But *how* ?" he erupted. "There're hardly any clues-and we have to do this before Voldemort gets strong enough to return, don't we? And Voldemort is getting stronger… Mr. Shin said the reason why the dream was clearer this time was because he's getting stronger! We don't have much time!"

"We may have more time than you think," said Dumbledore. "You have noticed, of course, the odd thing that happened in the Triwizard champion selection."

"The goblet's fire turned red *four* times," said Harry. "No name came out for the fourth time, though."

"Precisely, " said Dumbledore, blue eyes ablaze. "A powerful magical object such as the Goblet of Fire would not make such a mistake unless someone hoodwinked it to think there are *four* schools entering the tournament instead of three. My guess-and generally my guesses are very good-is that Voldemort meant for you to be the fourth champion. Thus his agent placed a powerful Confundus charm on the goblet, entered your name as a candidate for the fictitious fourth school, and entered no other name to ensure

your selection. However, an unexpected bit of luck has prevented you from being selected."

"So *that* was Pettigrew's blunder," said Harry, thinking rapidly. "I bet they put in the name 'Harry Potter'. I might be known as that, but I'm really 'Harry *Watson* '… Pettigrew either forgot to tell Voldemort or he didn't know…"

"That is my theory as well," said Dumbledore. "Though the goblet was tricked into selecting a fourth champion, since the only available candidate doesn't actually exist, it didn't select anyone."

Harry let out an unsteady breath, thoroughly shaken at the close-shave he didn't know he had.

"However, we cannot afford to rest," said Dumbledore. "That a Confundus charm was placed on the goblet means Voldemort's agent successfully infiltrated Hogwarts and the Ministry of Magic. Also, though Voldemort's plan to force you to participate in the Triwizard tournament failed, we know from your last vision that Voldemort believes the mistake can be rectified. This is sobering news. As you know from the way he treated Quirrell, Voldemort shows as much mercy to his followers as he does his enemies. That he allowed Pettigrew to live despite his failure means Voldemort thinks the ultimate purpose of your participation can still be achieved.

"Our fight, then, has two fronts. On the one hand, we must find all of Lord Voldemort's soul fragments so we may vanquish him completely. This is a frightfully difficult task, as you yourself noted, due to the disheartening dearth of clues and rapidly vanishing available time. On the other hand, we must discover who Voldemort's new agent is, and we must do so without rousing either the agent's or Voldemort's suspicion. This is also going to be extremely challenging as Hogwarts has never been more accessible to the outside thanks to the Triwizard tournament. We cannot take any person's apparent identity for granted; he or she may be someone else using Polyjuice Potion or an unwitting agent controlled remotely via the Imperius curse."

Harry bit his lower lip as he nodded. Both tasks sounded impossible.

He'd handled hard cases before, willingly and unwillingly, but never something this difficult.

"Either task is daunting by itself, but to handle both fronts alone is asking too much from any person," Dumbledore stated. "Thus I believe a delegation of tasks is needed.

"Grandmaster Shin and I shall focus on hunting down objects that contain Voldemort's soul fragments. Grandmaster Shin has decades of experience uncovering and destroying soul wands, and I have known Lord Voldemort since he was a student here in Hogwarts. I believe our combined knowledge and- excuse me if I sound a bit boastful- not inconsiderable magic prowess will allow us to tackle the task a tad better than others."

"It's not boasting if you're telling the truth," said Harry, grinning lopsidedly.

Dumbledore's moustache quivered.

"Indeed. That leaves the second task. Harry, I believe *you* are the one who must tackle it."

Harry's jaw dropped.

For a long time he just sat there, unable to comprehend what he'd just heard. Surely Dumbledore didn't say…

"With all due respect, Dumbledore," said a portrait of a clever-looking wizard with a pointed beard in a snide voice. "I hardly think a boy this young can handle a task you yourself labelled ' *extremely challenging* '."

"I hardly expect for you to understand, Phineas," said Dumbledore gravely.

"But Professor, I don't understand either," Harry protested. "Why do you think *I* can do it?"

"I believe you can do it because you have proven yourself, time and time again, capable of solving mysteries," Dumbledore replied. "For the last three years I have witnessed you displaying the most

remarkable combination of resourcefulness, determination, bravery and powers of deduction to tackle the most daunting cases: There was Quirrell and the philosopher's stone, of course, and the Chamber of Secrets. Also, last year you deduced the whole story behind Sirius's escape when no one else did."

"Sherlock did most of the thinking for all of those cases!" Harry protested again. "I'm *never* going to be as clever as him! And I'm turning stupider… I completely missed the hint to your office's password-"

"I think we should make allowances for the stressful current circumstances," said Dumbledore gently. "Speaking of Sherlock, didn't he say this past summer that you have the power of observation and that of deduction? That you are only wanting in knowledge, and that may come in time? How many people do you think he would give such an assessment?"

Harry felt himself go hot in the face. "Errr…"

"As you can see, it's not an opinion a foolish old man has by himself," said Dumbledore. "There is another reason I believe you should lead the effort. This second task requires more than just cleverness. The other ability this task requires you have in abundance, but Sherlock is rather inept at and Voldemort sadly doesn't even possess."

Harry wondered what Dumbledore was talking about. He couldn't be talking about magic, because he referenced Voldemort as well as Sherlock.

"I speak of your ability to care and love well," Dumbledore clarified.

Harry said nothing, but he couldn't help but think: *so what?* Few people in the world cared as ineptly as Sherlock, so having the ability to care better than him wasn't a recommendation worth touting. What did the ability to love have to do with solving the mystery, anyway? Caring too much often led to mistakes…

"Trust me, Harry, your ability to love will prove vital in solving this mystery," said Dumbledore seriously. "Now, do not think I have

forgotten about the soul fragment residing in your scar."

Harry swallowed.

"By necessity, we shall cross this bridge last," said Dumbledore quietly. "I hope, of course, that we will find a solution far preferable than you sacrificing your life. June Hu has told me about the promising lead he discovered last night, and the existence of the man almost sounds like an answer to a prayer. However, it would be foolish to assume success."

"Murphy was an optimist," Harry murmured.

"It is a heavy burden to be sure," said Dumbledore sombrely. "Few can carry it, and I shall not insult you by trivializing the burden."

"But I'm not going to let it ruin my life," said Harry savagely. "It doesn't deserve that kind of honour."

Dumbledore went still for a moment. Behind Harry, Fawkes the phoenix let out a low, soft, musical cry. Then to Harry's intense embarrassment, he suddenly realised that Dumbledore's bright blue eyes turned rather watery, and stared hastily at his own knees. When Dumbledore spoke, however, his voice was quite steady.

"I am very pleased and a little proud at how well you seem to be coping, Harry. It takes exceptional courage to face slow, encroaching death. I take my hat off to you-or I would, if I were wearing one."

Harry looked up. Dumbledore was looking at him with approval gleaming in his bright blue eyes.

"Now, Harry, permit me to give you the advice that I meant to give you before you've spoken so well: Rather than dwelling on a future that has not yet arrived and forget to live, you should keep yourself occupied and work on your given task as well as perform your duties as a student, lest the agent take notice."

"I understand," said Harry quickly.

"You also must not isolate yourself. If you have not yet done so, tell

your friends Mr. Ronald Weasley, Miss Hermione Granger, Miss Julia Lestrade and Mr. Neville Longbottom what you are facing. You will do them a disservice by not confiding something this important to them."

"I've told them and Julia already knows."

"Excellent," said Dumbledore, beaming. "Now my final piece of advice: hopefully it will not happen for many, many years to come, but I find death is generally easier to face when one has fewer things to regret about."

Something about that comment clicked in Harry's head. "So make a bucket list?"

"Something of the sort," said Dumbledore, smiling. "I have detained you long enough. Good night, Harry… and good luck."

Dumbledore watched Harry leave his office, quietly shutting the door behind him. After a few seconds of silence, a light glimmer appeared on a spot next to his desk. The light descended downwards to the floor, revealing an old man with short white hair and a clean-shaven, saturnine face in its wake.

"I see why you put so much hope in that child," said Shin June Hu quietly.

"His bravery, even after all this time, comes as a perpetual surprise," said Dumbledore, shaking his head.

"It is better to underestimate a person's moral capacity than to overestimate it and invite disappointment." Shin clasped his hands behind his back. "Are you ready?"

"Of course," said Dumbledore, rising.

Dumbledore waved his wand and the lights dimmed. The next moment, both men were striding across the lawns in the cool, misty darkness.

"What would our pursuit look like, my dear friend?" asked Dumbledore.

"Much like setting a bloodhound on a trail," Shin replied. "Perhaps it is because I have used my own blood so uninhibitedly for so long to perform magic, but my senses have become hypersensitive to the presence of life that has magic. All practitioners of blood-based magic seem to experience this sensitivity. My daughter can hear magic's heartbeat, as it were, and the man I've told you about can perceive magic through touch."

"Fascinating," said Dumbledore. "And you?"

"I can smell it."

"I assume soul wands and Horcruxes have a particular smell."

"They do."

"May I ask what kind of smell?"

Shin stopped. Dumbledore waited as he watched the moonlight playing across Shin's face.

"… Filth," Shin finally muttered, "decay; putrefaction; *death* ; it doesn't matter whether the soul locked inside was that of a good person, bad person, or a young child - they all smell like rot to me."

The rest of their trek continued in grave silence.

John stepped into the Diogenes' Club common room and surveyed the occupants. Each person was sitting in comfortable armchairs in their own little nook, napping or reading or munching on cucumber sandwiches. Not a single person paid any attention whatsoever to John and Benedict's entrance. Benedict snoozed inside his sling as John checked each member, confirming Mycroft wasn't among them.

As she turned to leave, John was suddenly gripped with a strong desire to pinch Benedict so he would shatter the stuffy silence with

his crying. That she had such a temptation didn't speak well of her motherly instincts, to say nothing of the risk of being bodily escorted out of the club, but John thought it might be worth it to see how these withering, misanthropic bodies would react to the noise and how they'd take John's new favourite universal excuse for everything: 'I have a baby'.

[Un]fortunately, one of the club valets/bodyguards/slaves intercepted before John could do anything foolhardy and directed parent and child to the Stranger's Room, where Mycroft was waiting.

"Did you know Benedict is the first infant to enter these halls?" said Mycroft as he poured the tea.

"No, but I'm not exactly surprised," John remarked. "Screaming babies can't be in accord with the club rules, can they?"

"Certainly not," said Mycroft. "So to what do I owe this visit?"

"Can't I bring my baby to visit his uncle?" said John as she pulled Benedict out of the sling and turned him around to face Mycroft. "You haven't seen him in person since the day he born. Say hi to uncle Mycroft, Benedict!"

Mycroft and Benedict pulled faces at each other.

"You can hold him too," said John cheerfully. "I'm not terribly fussed about germs, but you probably washed your hands before you came here. Seems like the sort of thing you'd do before you greet the unwashed masses."

Then without any further ado, John bullied Mycroft into holding Benedict.

"I must register my disbelief that this is mere a social call," Mycroft grumbled as Benedict started whimpering. "What does he want?"

John mimed sticking a pinky into one's mouth. Mycroft reluctantly offered a finger, acting as though he'd never done something this proletarian in his life. Benedict promptly grabbed it and started sucking it contently.

"Besides suggesting a dummy would be a more sanitary alternative, perhaps I should've stated that it is obvious from the state of your right forefinger that you are foreseeing dangerous days ahead of you," said Mycroft, pulling a look of distaste.

"You know, people should appreciate your and Sherlock's ability more; makes talking about difficult things so much easier," said John.

"I assume the danger comes from the Others," said Mycroft.

"Having a spot of trouble with homegrown terrorists," said John wryly. "No one wants that, especially when their ideology has a racist-extremist bent."

"Yes, such individuals can be very inconvenient, especially when they are armed." Mycroft eyed John. "How is my brother taking it?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since last Saturday night," John sighed. "Could mean he's upset; could mean he's thinking. How can I know?"

Mycroft and John sat in silence for a spell, each regarding the other phlegmatically by the dim light pouring through the windows.

"I never wanted to raise a child since Sherlock," said Mycroft.

"I'm going to ask one of my small group girls to do the raising. Jacqueline, probably," said John. Then she let out another sigh. "I just… I know it's not an inherited trait, and my ordinary genes probably cut the chances to half even if it was, but if by chance he does have Sherlock's brains, could you…?"

Mycroft sighed, "If you insist."

"Thanks."

"No, John, thank *you* ."

John took Benedict and left Diogenes right after the not-exchange

with Mycroft. A black Jaguar and a pretty brunette dressed in black were waiting outside the club building. John didn't know what to feel when she noticed the car had a baby car seat installed.

"Was this custom-made?" John asked as she strapped Benedict into the car seat, much to his displeasure.

"Mmm, no," said nameless brunette, dimpling.

"Shame," said John regretfully. "Benedict hates regular car-seats."

Benedict cried all the way back to Baker Street. Nameless Brunette and driver both looked extremely relieved when John released a red-faced and gasping Benedict and left the car with him.

"You really need to get used to it, Benedict," John chided as she climbed the steps. "Mummy and Daddy like cabs."

Benedict let out series of high-pitched shrieks in reply.

"Fine, I'll give you the boob," John groaned. "You know, I'm starting to think that's all I am to you: the person with the boob."

John was nursing Benedict when the communal MMN phone rang. Without thinking, John picked it up.

The holographic image of six kids-three boys and three girls-projected out of it. The red-haired boy with a long nose and freckles turned purple and looked away quickly, and the round-faced boy turned pink and covered his eyes.

"It's just a *boob*," John groused. "You know the thing you lived off of for the first year of your life?"

Ron made a gurgling noise as his ears turned red. Hermione, Julia and Ginny giggled. Deciding she'd teased the boys enough, John threw a towel over the exposed shoulder (and boob).

"There, I'm decent, you can look now," said John. "So what's up?"

From the jumbled and highly excited words that followed, John gathered Dumbledore had commissioned Harry and his partners in

crime-solving-which now included Ginny Weasley; Molly was going to have a coronary when she found out-to discover the identity of Voldemort's agent who infiltrated the Ministry of Magic and Hogwarts and tried (but failed) to enter Harry to the Triwizard tournament. It was exactly the sort of barmy and reckless thing the Headmaster of Hogwarts would do, and John's first instinct was asking what the bloody hell he was thinking. Then John noticed the shuttered and subdued look on Harry and decided reckless but busy was better than depressed and aimless (which was probably AD's aim, now that John thought about it more).

"… Anyway, we wanted to ask Sherlock-" Hermione was saying.

"Sherlock's not here. He's out thinking, I think," said John. Then she sighed. "So you need to hunt down an undercover terrorist. You know, I'm pretty knowledgeable about terrorists."

The kids looked at John in amazement.

"Well, after living through the height of IRA bombings and dealing with the al-Qaeda and Taliban at the front lines, I kind of had to," said John.

" *Oh*," said Harry, Hermione and Julia. Ron, Ginny and Neville, on the other hand, just looked clueless.

"You're either dealing with a new recruit or a really old one," John began. "I think you can rule out a new recruit. They tend to be young and reckless and senior-level terrorists only use them for brainless grunt work. Deep infiltration/undercover missions are usually given to trusted underlings who proved their loyalty over the years."

"So we should look up *old* LV followers," said Harry.

"Yes," said John. "Sherlock made an index, so you can read it up for quick reference."

"Oh, that'll be so helpful," said Hermione fervently.

John quirked her lips at her before continuing:

"Now this agent, he or she carried the torch for LV for thirteen years.

That's a long time to keep their dedication. And once LV contacted him/her again, he/she immediately does something big, reckless and attention-grabbing like trying to make Harry participate in the Triwizard Tournament, which is a public event. All this stinks of an extreme fanatic to me."

The kids nodded.

"Now the thing you need to know about extreme fanatics is that they want other people to know that they are," John explained. "I doubt anyone like that would've stayed underground after LV got hoisted by his own petard. The agent would've attempted something big and dangerous to bring LV back shortly after he vanished. Even if it didn't work, but the guy would've tried."

The kids went still. Neville in particular looked completely shaken.

"So you should look for an early LV resurrection attempt," said John as she burped Benedict. "I have a feeling the guys involved botched it badly and got caught. Operations like those usually fail because it's led by people who just lost their leader and are more driven by emotion than strategy. If you find one, look up who was involved." John paused. "Sirius might know who got thrown in prison for it, if it postdates his own imprisonment."

"You're right, Sirius would know!" said Ron excitedly.

"Just broach the subject carefully," John warned. "It's not something he'll want to remember."

Ron gulped. Harry nodded grimly. John wryly noted Harry's heightened alertness and stubborn set of his jaw; for someone whose temperament was entirely dissimilar to Sherlock, Harry certainly had Sherlock's single-mindedness when working on a case.

"Just one more thing before I unleash you into the wild," said John. " *Don't make your investigation look obvious* . Even if you find nothing, the fact that you're trying to find something might convince the agent he/she needs to eliminate you to eliminate the threat. Make a cover story. Give each other plausible alibis. Never discuss

things in public where people can overhear you. You're calling me from the music room, right?"

"We're using the noise-cancelling screens," said Hermione promptly.

"You need to stop doing that," said John. "Anyone following your movements is going to know the music room is your base of operations, and that someone can remove the noise-cancelling charm and eavesdrop."

Hermione covered her mouth in horror. John sighed.

"For now, keep changing your meeting places and find a more reliable way of keeping your conversations private," said John. "We can talk about your cover afterwards; just don't start the investigation until you have one."

"But we can work on our covers, right?" asked Julia.

"Yes, but be careful. You don't want other people to know it's a cover."

The kids agreed.

John dismissed them after telling them to get in contact with Sirius, who just left for Thailand in connection to the case Lestrade called Sherlock to take a look at. Once the call ended, John looked down at Benedict. Benedict looked up at John penetratingly.

"Yes, your mummy gives anti-terrorism advice to teenagers and lets them hunt wizard terrorists. Her life is very absurd," John told him.

Benedict gave John a big gummy smile.

"It's nothing to laugh at," John grumbled.

Severus observed the signs of tectonic shifts getting ready to shake the wizarding world to its roots shortly after the Triwizard Tournament champions were selected. Specifically, Severus observed the first sign during the double-potions class for Gryffindor

and Slytherin fourth years. He immediately noticed there was something defiant about the way Longbottom carried himself. Indeed, he merely glared right back, white-faced, when Severus criticized his ungainly efforts per routine. Wondering what brought this about, Severus probed his mind.

He saw the image of a dormitory late at night, with Longbottom sitting on a windowsill and clutching the sleeve of another boy sitting dangerously close to the edge of an open window. The scruffy outline of the other boy's head made it clear who it was. In the midst of this memory, Severus heard a strong voice of conviction:

I don't have time to be afraid of you.

Severus later wondered about the peculiar phrasing. ' *I don't have time* ' implied urgency, not rebellion. The image that accompanied the conviction showed Potter was at the root of Longbottom's change. Potter had a preoccupied air about him lately, and paid so little attention to the world around him that he didn't even notice the ugly factionist fights Rita Skeeter's article triggered until he literally walked into one.

The *Daily Prophet* published their first article featuring the Triwizard Tournament Champions the day after the weighing of wands. It was frankly a low quality report compared to the Magical Mobile Network's broadcast of the wand weighing event, but Skeeter did her best to garner reader attention. For her write up on Hogwarts's champion, she slipped in the interesting tidbit that Diggory once beat *Harry Potter*, acknowledge by many as the best spell-caster Hogwarts had seen in years, in a wizard's duel.

Severus was at the teachers' table when the students clamoured around Potter asking when he and Diggory had their duel. It was clear from his bewildered expression Potter had no idea what they were talking about. Then Granger reminded him that he and Diggory had been matched up two years ago, at the short-lived duelling club, when Severus had the students practice the disarming spell in pairs.

"Oh, that's right, he disarmed me," said Potter, bemused.

The students were revving up to be impressed until Ginny Weasley

made a sharp comment.

"That wasn't a duel, and someone crashed into you right after it started."

Potter blinked and scratched his temple gormlessly. "… Yeah, that happened too."

By the end of the day, the Hogwarts student body was torn between those accusing Diggory of giving an exaggerated account of his abilities to the *Prophet* out of conceit and those defending Diggory. The Hufflepuffs (and many female students) argued Diggory was misquoted and had words put into his mouth by the article's author. The Ravenclaws were inclined to coolly point out the *Prophet* couldn't have even written an exaggerated account of the 'duel' if Diggory hadn't mentioned it, therefore he must have told the reporter the incident to make himself look good. As for the Gryffindors, they were as one enraged at Diggory for daring to take a swipe at their favourite member. The lower-years, led by the Creevey brothers, spearheaded a campaign in support of Harry Potter, the *better* dueller, and several upper-years had taken to shouting insults at Diggory whenever he walked through the halls.

The tension between the two factions escalated to a boiling point by the end of the week, when finally a fifty-person strong fight erupted in the middle of the entrance hall. Of course, it was *that* fight Potter walked into.

McGonagall and Severus were alerted of the fight by one of the ghosts. When they got there, the entrance hall was full of rubberneckers and actual fight participants. McGonagall and Severus quickly pushed their way through, firing bangs in the air with their wands, but the shouts and bangs the students were making drowned out the sound.

"Ah, look, there he is," said Draco's voice somewhere in the centre of the crowd. "Harry Potter. The true spell master of Hogwarts… *or is he* ? How about it, Potter? You and Diggory: right here, right now. Settle the score. Show us who the real master duellist is…"

Several students hooted in agreement. Between the jostling bodies,

Severus saw Diggory's pale face. He assumed Potter was somewhere opposite.

"What's the matter, Potter?" Draco sneered. "Are you afraid? Maybe there's something to that article after all."

"Stuff it, Malfoy! If there's anyone who should be afraid, it's pretty-boy Diggory!"

"Yeah, I don't think he wants to risk his face. Just look at him!"

"Can't mar your pretty face for the camera, can you Diggory?"

There were more cat-calls and jeers.

It was abruptly cut short when an explosion like a bomb rattled the hall and fireworks erupted at one end of the centre, shooting up into the air like a fifteen foot tall fountain of sparks. The crowd backed away as one from the display.

McGonagall and Severus made it to the clearing as the fireworks died down. Potter was lowering his wand, clearly in towering rage.

"What the *HELL* is this?!" he shouted, trembling with fury, "Why the *hell* are we fighting?! Do you have any idea what we look like right now to Beauxbatons and Durmstrang!?"

Silence.

"Well, let me tell you what we look like!" Potter roared. "We look like those hooded-rioters at the World Cup! Do you think this is *funny?* Do you seriously think this something to risk your life over? *Is this really a life and death thing, damn it?!* "

"Oi, we just wanted to-" someone protested.

"Defend my honour?" said Potter coldly. "Well, *F*- you, I don't want the honour you're trying to give me."

More silence.

McGonagall shattered it by using her wand to set off a loud bang.

"All students must return to their dormitories at once!" she barked. "Professor Dumbledore will hear about this, make no mistake! Potter and Diggory, you two stay."

The students ducked their heads and quickly shuffled away. Soon Diggory and Potter were the only students in the hall.

"Inside," ordered McGonagall, pointing at the staffroom door.

They marched inside. Severus shut and locked the door behind them.

"Explain," said McGonagall as soon as the lock clicked.

Diggory haltingly explained his house year-mates started a scuffle with their other house counterparts at the entrance hall when the latter started cat-calling him. The scuffle quickly escalated into a bigger fight as more students joined in. A blonde fourth-year boy, whose name was Malfoy, spotted Potter and goaded him to duke it out with Diggory then and there. Potter and Diggory were pushed to the centre once he did so.

"So neither of you took part in the fight," said McGonagall, her lips set into a thin line.

"No, professor," said Diggory, still pale as parchment but meeting McGonagall's eye.

"I'm glad you're telling the truth," McGonagall said. "It doesn't look like either of you are injured."

Potter and Diggory reported negative. McGonagall sighed.

"Good. Now let's see - twenty points to Hufflepuff for refusing to participate in a riot, and *fifty* points to Gryffindor for stopping the riot."

Diggory bowed his head. Potter blinked bemusedly, as though he didn't think of it that way.

"Ten points from Gryffindor for your language, Potter," said Severus, because he knew McGonagall was going to, so he might as well.

"What, not twenty?" said Potter, eyebrows raised.

Severus curled his lip. "And another ten points for your *cheek* ."

Potter rolled his eyes.

"I almost forgot: twenty points to Gryffindor for your inspiring speech, Potter," McGonagall said, glaring at Severus. "You may go."

Potter marched off. Diggory left after him.

"I will send Draco to the headmaster," said Severus gravely, saving McGonagall the effort of demanding it.

"See that you do," said McGonagall, nostrils flaring. "The boy nearly made the situation even *worse* . Thank goodness Potter and Diggory didn't take the bait."

Severus shut himself inside his private quarters after doing what he'd promised to do. As he washed his face, he noticed the odd bruise that looked like a misshapen ring on his forearm-which refused to abate no matter what he did with it-had taken a distinct shape.

Severus stared at it, dripping water everywhere. The ring now looked like a skull, and unless he was in denial, the long curved thing coming out of the mouth was…

His phone rang.

Severus debated just letting it ring off. He had to go to Dumbledore and inform him about the mark. But if by chance the call was from Watson…

He picked it up.

And immediately regretted it; Sherlock Holmes's face sprang into view.

"No. Please stop," said Holmes as Severus moved to turn it off.

Severus froze. He heard the unsteady timbre in Holmes's voice. He

also noticed Holmes looked washed out and his skin looked paper-thin, like he'd fasted for days.

"Thank you," Holmes rumbled when Severus didn't move. "Snape, I owe you a thousand apologies."

A few beats passed.

"… What do you want?" Severus hissed. "You won't be saying this if you didn't want something."

The corner of Holmes's mouth twitched. But on the next blink the flicker of amusement was gone, and Holmes's face returned to its previous grim pallor.

"The same thing you want," said Holmes, "Keep Lily Evans's only son alive."

Severus stopped breathing.

"I don't ask anything else," Holmes promised.

Final Notes : *Sherlock is growing up* . Harry should pay more attention to the Crouch-and-Winky case, but he doesn't have the heart for it. As for future 'ships, HRHNJ+G will start thinking about dating soon. My aim is to make the progression believable and not pull any punches. I won't name pairings, but in this AU, both pairings and pairing-process *can't* and *won't* follow Canon. Now speaking of Ginny Weasley…

I think the biggest factor that pushed Ginny from selective shrinking violet to fierce lioness abruptly was the return of Voldemort at the end of GOF. She probably decided she needed to get a grip because she no longer had *time* to be shy around Harry. The girl is definitely gutsy and determined.

In my mind, Grandmaster Shin bears an uncanny resemblance to Hugo Weaving (of Matrix and LOTR fame). On an unimportant note: Cecilia, Julia's mum, took after her father and looks like Brigitte Lin of Asia Invincible fame, and Jacqueline took after her mother, Huang

Yue Ying, whom Shin met in Manchuria after he was exiled (see details of the exile in chapter 26).

I've updated several previous chapters (I always do). The changes were mostly details like numbers, grammar and removing the presence of minor (unnecessary) characters to make things smoother and more consistent.

Life Crises

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Four: Life Crises

It was nearly nine at night, and John was trying to put Benedict to sleep. Benedict, however, was in a lively and energetic mood since his five minute workout of lifting his head up, thus wasn't interested in sleeping. At length John gave up and put him in his bouncer seat.

John was watching Benedict squealing and grasping at the crocheted vegetables hanging over his bouncer seat when a mobile phone pinged. John dug out the electronic mobile phone and checked the new message:

Failed to bridge truce. Returning. SH

John sighed a little after absorbing the message. Then John put the phone away, sniffed Benedict's nappy, and confirmed he'd relieved himself. So John lifted Benedict out of the bouncer seat and started changing him with sanitized hands.

"Your daddy is an idiot," John informed Benedict as she fanned his naked bum.

Benedict was wearing a fresh nappy and wiggling in his bouncer seat when John heard the door downstairs open and shut. John

turned to study the flat's green door while listening to the approaching footsteps.

The door opened and Sherlock stepped into the sitting room. John noted the white down feathers in Sherlock's hair and coat, the bruise on his cheekbone, and the deep cuts on his hands when he removed his gloves.

"Though I admire the ingenuity of sending Hedwig to find me, I object to you ordering her peck me until I returned your calls," Sherlock stated as he draped his coat over the spare chair.

"That's what you get for going AWOL for days," John replied. "I see she didn't hold back."

"No. She even brought reinforcements."

John's eyebrows went up.

"There was *another* owl," Sherlock clarified, "a male snowy; Sasha, if I were to make a guess."

"Will it show up on YouTube?"

"Possibly, but doubtful."

"Shame."

John padded over to Sherlock. Sherlock leaned his gaunt frame against John once the distance between them vanished, and John round her arms around his torso.

For a while the two of them stood there at the threshold, holding each other up.

"We knew it was going to be a long-shot," said John. "He might still talk to me. Hopefully that will be enough."

"One hopes," Sherlock sighed. "It may have worked if I didn't mention Lily Evans."

"He reacted badly, I take it."

"It was unspeakably ghastly. I think his past history with Lily Potter was supposed to remain a secret between him and Dumbledore. He was quick to accuse Dumbledore of giving away hints, and refused to listen to my explanation that it was a shot in the dark based on old census data and how he avoids referencing Harry's mother."

John shook her head sadly. "He always did think he knows better."

"Regardless, I only needed to use my imagination to see how bad the idea was," said Sherlock ruefully. "If you married my archenemy and I was forced on a daily basis to see the child you had with said archenemy and later died to protect, I might act even as Snape has done. Who knows?"

"Yeah, you're lucky all your archenemies were either psychopaths or right tossers, because there were days when I was very tempted."

Sherlock flinched. "… I didn't need that mental image, John."

"You asked for it," John retorted.

John and Sherlock eventually moved to the sitting room table, where Benedict was on the verge of wiggling out of his bouncer seat. Benedict took one look at Sherlock and started crying.

"You know me," Sherlock protested as he picked him up. "Benedict, I'm your father."

"You've been away for almost two weeks, he probably *forgot*," said John, laughing at Sherlock's look of consternation. "So what you have been up to?"

"… Looking and thinking," said Sherlock as he stared down at the squalling Benedict, as though he was willing Benedict to recall him. "LV has an agent working for him, and it isn't Pettigrew. We know this because in Harry's vision LV received a letter when Pettigrew was present. Pettigrew's duties are likely limited to the day-to-day care of LV considering his general untrustworthiness. Therefore the letter-writer, who is the second agent, is in charge of the lion-share of LV's comeback preparations. One of these must be amassing funds. Lestrade noticed wizards are getting cleverer at exploiting

Muggles. And not only are they becoming cleverer in their methods, but they are becoming more organized in their methodology. Ergo, at least one magical well-versed in Muggle crime is orchestrating the efforts. From the last crime scene we know the Little Hangleton murderer, who is *certainly* one of LV's agents, is working with a military man who is also a wizard. The latter wizard's military history is evidence he has good working knowledge of our world. Such people are vanishingly few considering the Muggle-Magic divide, thus we may postulate the military man is the wizard organizing the magic criminals. We may also further postulate the agent employed the military man for the express purpose of gathering funds through the Muggle world."

John took Benedict away from Sherlock after digesting all this. Benedict hiccoughed into John's neck as he slowly calmed down.

"So: LV's agent is employing a military man who is also a wizard. Said military man is well-versed in organized crime, and is currently running a flourishing drug-running business for LV," said John.

"Yes, excellent summary."

"And you are looking for this other wizard."

"Your ability to restate the obvious improves every day, John."

" *Thanks*," John sighed. "Sounds like bad news all around except for LV."

"The man's expertise doesn't bode well for us, certainly," said Sherlock sombrely. "Do you recall the death of Mrs. Stewart, of Lauder, who jumped to her death from a bridge after her entire lifesavings were plundered last year? No? Well, then you should remember Moriarty's last scheme only worked as well as it did because several key members of the Secret Service including Mycroft were Confunded to believe a universal code that unlocks all electronic security measures can be real. The money laundering scheme also used the Confundus Charm to enchant non-magic people like Mrs. Stewart to reveal their bank account information to the culprit. What does this suggest?"

John stopped patting Benedict's back for a moment as the implications sunk in.

"… They might have been done by the same person," John breathed.

"The chances are high," agreed Sherlock. "Both schemes required high levels of magic expertise and Muggle world knowledge. According to Lupin and Black, the Confundus Charm is a difficult spell even for those who have N.E.W.T. level skills in charms. The subtly and elegance of the charm work certainly suggest mastery gained through extensive *practice*… meaning the culprit likely has a long history of using magic for Muggle crime."

John thought about it for a moment.

"How did Moriarty and LV find him?" John wondered. "Hiding magic from us Muggles is something magic kids are trained to do from the moment they learn about magic. Unless they were, I don't know, close cousins or something, how could Moriarty even know about this wizard? And if the guy was mostly involved in *muggle* crime, how would anyone in the wizarding world be aware of his expertise?"

"How Moriarty got to know the wizard, we may never know. All we *do* know is that Moriarty paid him liberally and used him in only high-class jobs which no ordinary criminal could have undertaken. His identity was so carefully concealed that even when Moriarty's criminal empire was broken up, Mycroft wasn't sure he existed. But he does exist. Mycroft wouldn't have had an active Confundus charm on him otherwise. Also, Moriarty confessed under the influence of a truth serum that his right-hand man ' *had skills you wouldn't believe* ' and ' *worth every hundred grand* ."

"What about LV? How could he have known about the military wizard?"

Sherlock placed a printed mug-shot of a man on the table.

"This is the wizard Lestrade initially arrested for the money laundering case," he said.

John studied the man in the photograph. He had a receding hairline, the brow of a philosopher, a thin, projecting nose, cold glassy-blue eyes, and drooping, cynical lids. His skin looked weather-beaten and sunbaked, and there was something insolent about the way he set his lips, like he was trying not to show how amused he was at his own arrest.

"He was released after convincing the Magical Law Enforcement that he himself was a victim of a Confundus charm," Sherlock explained. "I'm inclined to think he was the perpetuator. His military background is plain on his face and shoulders."

"Looks like a sniper."

"He was; for her majesty's royal marines, judging from his hands, stance and build."

"Harry might know him, then."

"Ask her if she does," said Sherlock. "He called himself Parker, but I doubt that's his real name. We need to find out who he really is. We have this photograph, but I can't rule out the possibility he was using a disguise. Once we get a name and an approximate birthdate, we can find his Muggle identity from the military records."

"You still haven't answered how LV could've known him."

" *He was arrested once, John*," said Sherlock impatiently. "The Ministry of Magic is aware of his existence. Lestrade said the Magical Law Enforcement was reluctant to let 'Parker' go, but had to because they couldn't prove he was the mastermind behind the money laundering scheme. If LV's second agent infiltrated the Ministry of Magic-and I have no reason to doubt he has-then it is not a stretch to imagine the agent had learned about 'Parker' from his Ministry colleagues and made contact."

John nodded in understanding.

"Makes sense. It still amazes me how you can make all these connections," said John. "I better tell this to the kids. I'd hate for them to not know what they're up against if they ever encounter

Parker."

"They're looking for the agent?" asked Sherlock, eyebrows ascending.

"Dumbledore asked them to. He told them the agent has to be one of the Ministry of Magic employees involved in the Triwizard Tournament since he bamboozled the goblet of fire to make Harry the *fourth* champion. Thank *God* it didn't work."

Sherlock made a small ' *oh* ' sound.

"The goblet deliberated four times. Of course. How could I have overlooked this?"

"At least someone didn't," said John. "The kids are using their tournament filming and broadcasting activities to get in touch with the Ministry. They even formed an undercover media company to make it look like they're serious about filming and broadcasting. The company's technically a subsidiary of the MMN since Jackie's funding the whole thing, but she's letting them make the decisions."

"Clever," said Sherlock in approval. "How far are they in the set up?"

"They're meeting Ludo Bagman this coming Saturday to tell him they're now responsible for the Tournament broadcast. You don't have to worry about them botching it up. Jeremy's going to be there as a consultant." John paused. "I'm acting as shadow director since it was the only way to get Molly Weasley to agree. She's having kittens about Ron starting a business." John started imitating Molly's anxious voice. "' *How could Ms. Shin let them start a business, they're much too young! Ron has never done anything like this before, and what if he loses the money she gave him?* '" John rolled her eyes. "Seriously, if she knew the amount of fecks Jack doesn't give…"

"The MMN only stays afloat because of her inability to be irresponsible," Sherlock agreed.

"It's thriving, actually. Did you know she makes close to a million Galleons a *month* ?"

Sherlock blinked at John.

"Her revenue doubled since Ron headed the World Cup broadcast," said John. "Molly really has nothing to worry about. Ron is worth every knut invested."

Sherlock snorted. "What is Harry's role?"

"He's the main camera guy. I figured he should be as close to the real action as possible without actually being in the middle of it. He's not into the business aspects of the cover anyway."

"Sensible," Sherlock approved. "As a cameraman, he will be able to observe and investigate without drawing too much attention."

Then he paused.

"… So how is he coping?" Sherlock asked.

"Well, he's not just contemplating his navel, though he does have his moments," answered John sombrely. "He's a bit guarded around his friends, but he's open to talking to me."

"What do you talk about?"

"Funerals."

There was a short pause.

" *Funerals*," Sherlock repeated.

"Yep," said John. "I plan on taking him to a funeral."

"Why?"

"I think he should."

Sherlock wordlessly regarded John.

"You won't be the only person giving me flack about it," said John stoically.

"Don't equate me with Black," Sherlock retorted. "I've always

deferred to your wisdom when it comes to Harry's upbringing. You obviously think it is helpful. I just want to know *why* ."

John and Sherlock regarded each other for a long time. Benedict blinked quietly in his mother's arms, as though he was aware of the weightiness of the situation.

"… He needs to know death is serious business," John eventually answered. "I don't want him to trivialize his own death. Life isn't a commodity you can give and take away. I mean, isn't this what the wizarding world is going to ask him to do: *If you die for us, you will be doing a terribly noble thing. We'll do our best to remember your sacrifice afterwards* ." John drew in a deep breath before hissing: "How dare they ask him to give up his life when they don't have the power to give it back!"

Sherlock remained expressionless as he said: "So you believe as much as you value *death* you shall value *life* ."

" *Yes*," said John harshly.

Sherlock nodded as he looked up to the ceiling.

"I'm glad we're on the same page, John," he said. "My worry was that, in the end, Harry will willingly walk to his death because he'd imagine you doing so under the same circumstances. We can possibly keep him alive, but we can't make him want to live. If you think going to a funeral will give him the will to live, by all means go."

John exhaled unsteadily.

"Thanks."

In the morning after the riot in the entrance hall, Harry quickly sensed many of his fellow Gryffindors were upset at him. He received glares from several upper-classmen at the common room, and Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas whispered to each other at the Gryffindor table, not looking up or responding to Harry's good mornings. Harry felt nothing but a dull ache at this; though anger made a feeble effort to flare up in his chest, it quickly skulked back

to the pit from whence it came as soon as he thought how he was going to defend himself. Why would they think the fight was petty when they didn't have death hanging over their heads? How could they understand *him* when they never had an occasion to think they could die any time because the alternative was unthinkable?

So Harry ignored the murmurings and picked at his breakfast.

"Hogsmeade trip today!" said Ron brightly. "You're going, aren't you Harry?"

"Yeah, sure," Harry said, not feeling excited, but not feeling reluctant either. Ever since receiving the fateful/fatal announcement and that talk with Dumbledore, Harry experienced wild motivation swings. Most days he was almost normal, going to class, doing homework, practicing violin and working on his given task without anyone the wiser (including himself). But other days… an all-enveloping lethargy that made even getting out of bed a herculean task was all he could manage. Apparently today was the latter sort of day.

"Great. We can have our meeting with Mr. Jeremy there at the Three Broomsticks. Then we can take a nice *break* ." Ron sighed deeply. "Who'd've thought starting a company was so much *bloody work* ?"

Harry, Ron, Hermione, Julia, Neville and Ginny had got down on the business of thinking up ways to hide their investigation as soon as they finished talking to John. Hermione cleverly suggested that they should use their Triwizard Tournament filming activities, as it would allow them to spend many (explainable) hours in the music room and get to know all the people involved in organizing the tournament. The latter was crucial, since the agent was deeply involved in the tournament as well. Julia further elaborated the idea by suggesting they make a show of creating *other* mixed-media programs to broadcast over the MMN, as it would give them an excuse to research non-school things in the library and interview strangers. Ron declared the ideas were so good it didn't *have* to be a show. Later, when John gave their cover the green light, Ron presented to Miss Jackie the idea of broadcasting more mixed-media programs over the MMN. She accepted the proposal, but with one caveat:

"The Magical Mobile Network is a *telecommunications* company, Ron," she said. "What you want to do is *media broadcasting* . Telecom and media may be closely related, but they're not the same thing. So I suggest you create a media broadcasting company and try the idea under your own name."

Ron gaped for a long time.

"… *You think we should start our own business* ?!" he squawked.

"Yes," said Miss. Jackie simply. "I really think you can do it, and why not? If you're worried about the money: don't. I'll give you the triwizard tournament broadcast as a seeding project and ten thousand Galleons for your setup costs. You can use my computer equipment, too."

Thus Ron left the meeting in a state of shock. Once everyone else got over their own shock, the six of them decided to name the undercover company OBH-not short for Open-source Broadcasting Headquarters or whatever else people may assume, but ' *Oh, Bloody Hell* '.

"I still can't believe she gave us so much money just like that," Ron marvelled.

"Well, she is one of the richest people in Wizarding Europe," said Hermione matter-of-factly. "She can easily afford to invest ten thousand. Still, it was very nice of her to help us out…"

"Yeah, it's good, it's very great, but you do realise we have to, you know, *actually start this company* ?" Ron said.

"You mean *you'll* have to start the company," said Ginny.

Ron goggled at his sister. "You can't be serious! I can't start a company by myself!"

"She told *you* should start the company and gave the money to *you*," Ginny pointed out. "That means you should be the owner."

Ron was driven speechless.

"Don't worry, Ron. We'll act as your business partners," Hermione assured. "Now, the first thing we need to do is make the OBH a *real* business…"

They asked Miss Jackie how this was done. She told them all businesses in the wizarding world were what Muggles called 'private small businesses,' thus weren't subjected to the same kind of rules and regulations as corporations or conglomerates. In short, anyone could start a business, provided the owner reported his/her earnings and qualified expenses to the Ministry of Magic or to the traders' guild the owner was a member of. However, since all of them were minors, their parents/guardians had to know about their earnings so they could properly file taxes.

"Speaking of which, Ron, did your mother get a copy of all your paystubs?" Miss Jackie asked.

"Yeah," said Ron. "And I give mum half of my pay; more than what you asked me to."

Miss Jackie smiled warmly. "And you wonder why I think you can run your own company," she said, making Ron turn red around the ears. "The OBH is *yours*, so I don't have much say on what you should do, but I advise you to keep honouring your parents with your earnings. Speaking of, I told Jeremy I gave you the triwizard tournament broadcast project. He'll contact you soon."

Mr. Jeremy called Ron over the MMN within twelve hours.

"Jack told me she sold the tournament broadcast project to the media broadcasting company you've started. Is this true?" he asked, disbelief etched all over his face.

"Uh, yeah," said Ron.

"Precocious aren't you, starting a *media* company at your age?"

"It just kind of happened," said Ron defensively. "So do you still want to help out? I don't mind hiring you."

"Count me in," said Mr. Jeremy, eyes gleaming.

Ron and Mr. Jeremy agreed to meet on the following weekend at Hogsmeade. Mr. Jeremy Owled a lot of paperwork for Ron to read in preparation for the meeting. Ron picked one roll of parchment at random, and visibly withered in his seat after reading the first paragraph, which was full of complicated words written in a tiny script. Hermione alone had the courage and brains to read all the documents and make sense of the contents.

"Looks like the Ministry is entitled to twenty percent of the tournament broadcast revenue generated on the first week of airing," Hermione reported. "In exchange we have full access to all tournament areas. We can film the task preparation process as long as we don't broadcast it before the champions go through their assigned tasks. The ministry can refuse to let us film something if it's against any nondisclosure rules, but we have final say on what gets broadcasted over the MMN."

"Couldn't he list that out in bullet-points?" Ron groaned.

"I'm just summarizing. There are a lot of important little details here," Hermione said. "For instance, it says here this agreement only relates to the tournament broadcast and not any other broadcasts MMN decides to do, and-"

"I'll take your word for it," Ron interrupted. "Have I ever told you how much I appreciate you for being so bloody brilliant?"

Hermione turned pink.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Julia quickly immersed themselves in work. They were very lucky to have Hermione organizing their tasks and overseeing the fine details, because otherwise they would've missed the fact the Ministry hadn't been paid what they were due from broadcasting the champion selection ceremony and the late penalties *that* could've garnered was enough to make the OBH go bankrupt. Harry, Ron, Hermione and Julia spent all of their free time in the library for the remainder of the week, working out how much they owed the Ministry and fitting in their homework somewhere in between. Harry and Ron hunted down the expense and earnings data, Julia crunched all the numbers, and Hermione put everything together into a neat report using the charts and graphs Ron, Julia

and Harry had made.

"You know, before now I thought Miss Jackie was paying Ron far too much," Ginny remarked as she watched Ron do something viciously complicated for his report. "He really does earn every Knut, doesn't he?"

"You have no idea," said Julia, not looking away from the laptop she was using to create pie-charts.

While they cocooned in the library, everyone noticed Viktor Krum was in the library an awful lot too. Harry wondered what he was up to. Was he studying, or was he looking for things to help him through the first task? Hermione often complained about Krum being there- not that he ever bothered them- but because groups of giggling girls often turned up to spy on him from behind bookshelves, and Hermione found the noise distracting.

"He's not even good-looking!" she muttered angrily, glaring at Krum's sharp profile. "They only like him because he's famous! They wouldn't look twice at him if he couldn't do that Wonky-Faint thing-"

"Wronski Feint," Ron muttered as he continued to stare avidly at Krum. Unlike Hermione, he was always keen to spot Krum in the library.

Ginny and Neville mostly hovered during the hellish two weeks. They wanted to help, but neither of them took Muggle Studies or worked for Miss Jackie before, so they lacked the necessary skills and knowledge.

This didn't stop them from trying, however.

"You can teach us how, we can learn!" Ginny argued.

"I don't have *time* to teach!" said Hermione shrilly, looking almost hysterical as she typed frantically away. "Don't you know we have to get these done by next Friday?!"

Ginny demanded to Ron that he teach her and Neville as soon as he handed over his work to Hermione. Ron's teaching attempts usually ended in blazing rows, Ron yelling at Ginny for not doing what he

told her to do, Ginny shouting right back, accusing Ron of not explaining properly and Neville shrinking from them both. Harry and Julia took over the coaching after the nth blowup. For the first coaching session, Harry oversaw Ginny and Julia, Neville. They had to switch afterwards because Ginny was so anxious to do well in front of Harry that she made all manner of mistakes and Harry didn't know enough about computers to fix these mistakes; Julia, on the other hand, couldn't explain things simply enough for Neville to understand because whereas Julia used computers since she was three and did computer programming on the side, Neville needed to be told there was a connection between the movement of the mouse and the movement of the cursor. The huge disparity in their knowledge often left Neville red-faced and confused and Julia taking time-outs to scream into a pillow in a corner. Neville eventually figured out how to click icons once Harry started coaching, but Ginny's ill-will towards computers steadily mounted as she kept confusing the purpose of the keyboard and their short-keys and the mouse's functionality again and again and *again* .

Tempers were at a breaking-point when Hermione shrieked she was *done*, the reports were *done*, and they could owl the reports to the ministry *now* . They wasted no time running to the Owlry. The moment they stepped into the drafty and cold tower, they were immediately ambushed by a large flock of very bored owls.

" *Clear off* !" Ron roared, waving a fist at the sea of fluttering wings and outstretched talons. As soon as the owls cleared off, Ron shouted: " *PIG* ! Damn it, Pig, where are you!? Come here, you stupid little- OUCH!"

Pigwidgeon had collided right into Ron's forehead. The tiny owl plummeted to the ground half-way before righting himself. Then he started twittering like mad as he circled around Ron's head, ecstatic at the idea of delivering a letter for the first time. Ron snatched him out of the air and plunked him on the nearest perch. All of the owls around them glared coldly at Pigwidgeon, a few clicking their beaks in disapproval and others showing their tails, apparently disgusted at the unworthy way he was acting as a Post Owl.

"Take this to Ludo Bagman, ASAP," snarled Ron as he secured the report to Pigwidgeon's tiny leg. "Stop wiggling! Now don't you dare

lose these reports, we spent *ages* making it!"

Ron tossed Pigwidgeon out of an open window. They watched the tiny owl fly off to a distance until he disappeared from sight. A boneless exhaustion enveloped them all as their anxiety drained away.

"That had to be the *worst* two weeks we ever had," said Hermione tiredly.

"What are you talking about, don't you just *love* the Sense of Accomplishment after days of hell?" said Ron sarcastically.

"I think I'd rather buy a Sense of Accomplishment from someone else," sighed Julia.

They staggered downstairs, intending to have a large dinner and a good long sleep afterwards.

"We're not done yet," Hermione reminded them as they trudged through the halls. "This is only the *setup* . We still have to figure out who You-Know-Who's new agent is."

"I'm only going to say this once," said Ron sternly. "We are NOT going to talk about work today. It's bad enough we had two bloody weeks of nothing *but* ."

Unfortunately, they couldn't relax until much later. Instead of an uneventful walk to the Great Hall, they found the entrance hall embroiled in a huge riot. Harry was immediately pushed to the centre when Malfoy spotted him and tried to goad Harry and Cedric into having a wizard's duel, much to the crowd's apparent approval. Harry never thought he'd ever feel grateful to see Snape, but he did when Professors Snape and McGonagall showed up after he blew up on everyone. Harry had no appetite when McGonagall dismissed him and Cedric, so he returned to Gryffindor tower and fell into his bed, hoping for dreamless sleep.

It didn't come. Harry tossed and turned all night, tormented by featureless nightmares. Then morning came, and Harry was tempted to wrap his invisibility cloak around him and duck under his

bed. Ron drew back the curtains of his four-poster and overturned his covers before he could find the energy to do so. Only an hour passed since then, and he already had *more* work to look forward to. The nightmare just didn't seem to end.

For the second time since the term started, something inside Harry collapsed and refused to move.

"I want to go home," he mumbled, dropping his face into his hands.

"You can go after Hogsmeade," said Hermione gently. "Make it a two day trip."

"Yeah, you haven't visited John and Benedict for two weeks," said Ron.

Harry said nothing. He had meant he wanted to go home and never come back. Pretend like magic didn't exist so he could forget about Voldemort… forget about death…

"Harry?" said Ginny worriedly.

Reluctantly, Harry lifted his head. "Sorry, just felt really tired," he muttered.

His friends watched him carefully for a moment.

"What do you *really* want to do, Harry?" asked Hermione.

Harry blinked at her.

"I don't think you enjoy business stuff," said Hermione. "I mean, OBH is important and all, but I think Ron and I can take of most of it. Right?"

"Yeah, we're totally fine," said Ron quickly.

"But…" Harry protested.

"You don't have to worry about it," said Hermione firmly. "All you have to worry about is the filming and we're well set on that front. So, what do you want to do?"

Harry hesitated. What he *wanted* was learning he didn't have to die, but that wasn't something he could *do* . He'd loved to help Miss Jackie and Dr. Ju, but Harry figured he'd be more of a hindrance than help. Moreover, Dumbledore gave him a task, and Harry didn't want to disappoint him, not when Dumbledore trusted him so much. However, Hermione was right; though it was necessary for the investigation, he didn't enjoy working on the OBH. But what else was there to do? It wasn't like they had any new leads or fresh ideas…

"I don't know," said Harry honestly.

"Let's play a game of Quidditch, then," said Ron. "Come on- two on two, Fred and George can play… and we can use the Quidditch pitch; no one's using it now…"

" *Ron*," said Hermione, in an I-don't-think-you're-being-very-sensitive sort of voice, "Harry doesn't want to play Quidditch… he's worried, and he wants to see Benedict…"

"Yeah, I want to play Quidditch," said Harry suddenly. "Let's do it after the meeting and a round of butter beer at the Three Broomsticks."

Hermione rolled her eyes, muttering something that sounded very much like " *Boys* ", which made Ginny giggle.

Harry set off to Hogmeade after breakfast with all his close friends, Ginny and Julia able to join now that they became third years. The six of them stopped by Honeydukes Sweetshop first, and emerged later eating large cream-filled chocolates. Then they headed to the Three Broomsticks pub.

The Three Broomsticks was packed, mainly with Hogwarts students enjoying their free afternoon, but also with a variety of magical people Harry rarely saw anywhere else. Julia spotted Mr. Jeremy at a table in the corner, dressed in a beautifully cut pearly grey suit and black shirt. They edged towards him.

"Hello, Sunshine," said Mr. Jeremy, beaming at Julia.

"Now I know you're up to something," Julia said, eyes narrowed.

"I feel wounded," said Mr. Jeremy, putting on a theatrical expression of pain for a second. Then just as quickly he put it away and became very business-like: "Bagman will be here in a minute. He was very impressed at the report by the way- said it was the prettiest report he'd seen by far. Have you got the gold ready?"

Harry patted his messenger bag. Mr. Jeremy nodded in approval.

"You also need a receipt for him to sign. I don't know if you've drawn one up, but-"

Hermione promptly set a sheet of parchment on the table. "I wrote it up last night," she said brightly.

"Gosh, you're on top of everything," said Mr. Jeremy admiringly as he read through the parchment, and Hermione glowed. "Okay, this looks good. I'll just add that signing this receipt marks an end to your financial obligations to the Ministry of Magic in regards to the champion selection broadcast."

"Do we really need to specify that?" Ron asked as Mr. Jeremy wrote down the clause.

"Oh *yes*," said Mr. Jeremy grimly. "I once had to pay a middleman twice for a shipment of dragon hide because I didn't specify that in my receipt. I'm not about to make that mistake again!"

Ron gaped in disbelief as Mr. Jeremy dotted the last full stop. Then Mr. Jeremy took out his wand and started muttering a long incantation.

"You're adding a binding magical contract, too?" asked Hermione, surprised.

"You're in fourth year and you already know the incantation to magical contracts?" said Mr. Jeremy, looking very impressed. "But yes, I always add binding magical contracts to receipts. The wizarding world doesn't have legally binding contracts, you know- just magically binding ones. So if a guy makes a deal in bad faith, you're doomed."

"That's so cut-throat," said Julia, crunching her face.

"That's what makes it fun," said Mr. Jeremy. "No game is fun without a bit of risk."

"I think I prefer boring."

Mr. Jeremy continued to chat with Ron, Hermione and Julia. Harry tuned out and watched the people in the pub instead. All of them looked cheerful and relaxed. Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbott were swapping Chocolate Frog cards at a nearby table. Right over by the door he saw Cho Chang, the Ravenclaw Quidditch team Seeker, and a large group of her girlfriends. There was a pair of students he didn't know, cuddling at their table by a window.

What wouldn't he have given to be one of these people, sitting around laughing and talking, with nothing to worry about but homework? He imagined how it would have felt to be here if he didn't have death hanging over his head. He wouldn't feel as he did now, for one thing. He and his friends would probably be happily imagining what deadly dangerous task the school champions would be facing on Tuesday. He'd have been really looking forward to it, watching them do whatever it was, cheering on Cedric with everyone else. Then Harry wondered how this could ever be a good thing. John had claimed living like she was already dead was the best thing that happened to her. But how could it be, when it left Harry feeling hopeless, anxious and unmotivated all at once? He wanted his old forgetfulness of death back. At least he was happy back then…

"Ah!" said Mr. Jeremy. "Just the man we've been waiting for! Mr. Ludo Bagman!"

" *Jeremy* !" Bagman called happily as he bounced over. "Good to see you, mate! Good to see you!"

Bagman sat down at their table and smiled, looking around at him. He was wearing sedate robes of dark forest green today, but he was as boyishly exuberant as he was back at the World Cup.

"Mr. Bagman, this is Ron Weasley. He's in charge of the broadcast,"

said Mr. Jeremy, patting Ron's shoulder. "I believe you know his father, Arthur Weasley?"

"Of course!" said Bagman, beaming. "Arthur is an old mate of mine; helped my brother Otto this past summer…"

"Lovely," said Mr. Jeremy. "Ron, why don't you introduce Mr. Bagman your team?"

"Uh, okay," said Ron, looking caught off-guard. "Errr, this is Hermione Granger. She… oversees everything and is on top of everything-" (Hermione turned pink and pleased) "-this is Julia Lestrade, she does the editing-" (Julia did a small bow) "-and this is Harry Potter. He's our cameraman."

Bagman did the smallest of double takes when he heard Harry's name, and his eyes performed the familiar flick upward to the scar on Harry's forehead.

"And this is Neville Longbottom and my sister Ginny. They… just joined," Ron ended lamely.

"Thank you, Ron," said Mr. Jeremy, taking over the conversation again. "Now first things first: we'd like to pay the Ministry what they are due…"

At Mr. Jeremy's prompting, Harry took out from his messenger bag the drawstring bag that contained twenty percent of revenues the champion selection ceremony broadcast generated on the first week. Bagman's eyes seemed to pop out of their sockets as the bag thudded on the table, the seams of the bag straining to contain all the gold Galleons and silver sickles inside (calculated accurately to the last knut-not that they needed to add any knuts).

"… Everything seems to be in order," said Bagman, staring wide-eyed at the bag's contents.

"Sign here please," said Hermione, pushing the receipt with a quill lying diagonally across it.

Bagman signed the parchment immediately without reading the contents. Julia raised an eyebrow at that.

"Now that that's settled, we'd like to talk about the first task preparations," said Mr. Jeremy smoothly. "You don't have trouble with us filming it, do you?"

"Of course not," boomed Bagman, waving a hand. "The reserve keepers are scheduled to arrive at Hogwarts today-you can take a peek whenever you like! You just have to keep quiet until the champions tackle them… mind, I don't think it would make any difference even if they *did* know, considering-"

"How about this evening?" Mr. Jeremy asked, cutting off Bagman.

"Oh, I don't know," said Hermione anxiously. "Harry was planning to go visit home this weekend, and…"

"I can do the filming," said Julia.

"You're supposed to go see Isaac today, Julia," Mr. Jeremy objected. "You haven't seen him for over a *month* ."

"But…"

"It's fine. I can do it," said Harry quickly. "I can go home on Sunday-that was when I planned to go anyway."

"You were?" asked Neville, startled.

"Yeah," said Harry as he checked his calendar. "Professor Lupin being sick and all…"

All the students at the table went round-eyed as they remembered there was a full moon that night.

"Are you going to be there?" asked Harry before Mr. Jeremy could ask about the significance of Lupin being sick.

"No, I'm not allowed to enter Hogwarts until the day of the first task," Mr. Jeremy replied. "You'll have to ask Hagrid. Anyway, Mr. Bagman-"

"Good lord, I've got to run!" said Bagman suddenly, looking rather alarmed as he stared at a window where Fred and George could be

seen passing by. "Sorry, but I just remembered something-I'll see you on Tuesday!"

Then clutching the money bag tightly, Bagman Disapparated with a small *pop* .

"-He's so easy to work with," said Mr. Jeremy, smiling crookedly. "Wished he stayed longer-I was going to pitch the idea of starting a magical sports channel on the MMN."

"Couldn't you have told us this *before* ?" Julia grumbled.

"Well I just *got* the idea, so I couldn't have," said Mr. Jeremy.

"You keep doing that," said Hermione, frowning. "You can't just take over just because you have an idea."

"Was it a *bad* idea?" asked Mr. Jeremy, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, no-"

"Then why are you complaining?" said Mr. Jeremy impatiently. "You can't schedule opportunities. You grab them when they come along."

"But *we're* the ones who have to do all the work!" Julia exclaimed. "Magical Sports channels don't just magically appear, you know!"

"Didn't Jackie nuna already build the foundation for this sort of thing?"

"Yes, but it's not as simple as plug-and-play! We have to film everything and edit everything and…"

"Then hire more help! Aren't people queuing up to work for the MMN?"

"Don't you know what happened the last time we tried to hire someone to help?" said Hermione incredulously. "We had hundreds of unqualified candidates! It was a complete nightmare!"

"How high did you set the bar?"

"All we asked for was someone who could turn-on a bloody computer! How much lower were we supposed to set it?" Ron cried.

"Well-" Mr. Jeremy started, but at that point Harry had enough.

"I'm sorry Mr. Jeremy, but the Triwizard Tournament is all we can handle right now," he said loudly. "If we do more, your sister's going to pull the plug and sack us all. You know she will."

Mr. Jeremy shut his mouth at that. Then he pursed his lips.

"She would," he admitted grudgingly. Then he sighed. "I'm sorry, I got carried away."

"Yeah, you did," Julia quipped.

"I said I was sorry," Mr. Jeremy grumbled. "I suppose they're no way you could add more employees?"

"People don't even know we exist," Ron pointed out.

" *Yet*," Mr. Jeremy said. "Just you wait. This company is going to change the entire wizarding world, and then everyone is going to know. The broadcasting project already changed the way wizards and witches think. They're starting to realise they can see places and events they can't go to personally- the Quidditch World Cup and Triwizard Tournament, case in point. They're hungry for more, and you're the only one in the game providing what they want. There's no way it won't become big."

Ron nodded eagerly.

"You know, the wizarding world really needs people like you and my sister," Mr. Jeremy said. "Jackie nuna's MMN was the first bit of proper innovation I've seen in decades. Now you lot are making more innovations on top of it. Between the two of you, the wizarding world is finally seeing some much needed change. Our world's been stagnant for too long-I mean, just look at the edition changes Hogwarts textbooks went through: there hasn't been a major update for the last eighty years! If that doesn't indicate *stagnant*, I don't know what is. But most wizards are too busy squabbling over blood-purity and maintaining status quo. It's ridiculous."

Hermione started listening intently at this point. Ron and Ginny were also transfixed. Neville looked a bit confused, but nevertheless interested, and Julia was inscrutable.

"This really can't continue," said Mr. Jeremy seriously, stabbing his right forefinger on the table. "Any culture that remains stagnant for long is on its way out. We wizards used to be the leaders - now we're barely able to stagger after Muggles and lately we're not even doing that. Wizards only started thinking about magical photographs *years* after Muggles popularized them, you know; clearly Muggle-borns are the ones to introduce the concept."

"Louise Tablot," said Hermione immediately. "He's the Muggle-born wizard who developed the first wizarding photograph in 1890."

"Exactly," said Mr. Jeremy. "But as I was saying: today's wizardry is *stagnant* and on its way out. We need a *new* kind of wizard before our culture dies. I think we should resurrect the old meaning of 'wizard', which is ' *wizen one* ' or ' *wise one* '. The contemporary wizard is someone who can navigate both the wizarding world and muggle world, someone who can handle both magic *and* science; a truly *wise one* ."

Hermione actually shivered with excitement.

"And I think Jacqueline is the model we need to sell," Mr. Jeremy went on. "No offence to you, Harry, but I think Jackie nuna is in a better position to be the icon we need. Once the ordinary wizard and witch is sold to the idea people like Jacqueline are *cool*, well… things are going to get *interesting* ."

Mr. Jeremy looked at them all meaningfully.

" *We can make this happen*," he said earnestly. "I know we can. We just have to keep doing what we're doing right now and do it *well* . I'm counting on you."

"Yeah," said Ron breathlessly. "Yeah, you can count on us."

"I know," said Mr. Jeremy, looking at Ron with fierce pride.

Mr. Jeremy departed after bidding them all farewell. Ron, Hermione

and Ginny started talking excitedly as soon as he left.

"See, I told you he isn't bad!" said Ron. "I always come out of a meeting feeling inspired!"

"He does sound like a visionary," said Hermione, nodding in approval. "I mean he has his faults, but his ideas are sound."

"And he was in Slytherin," Ginny said. "He's the first Slytherin who doesn't buy pure-blood rubbish I've ever seen. That definitely counts as something." Then she looked at the quiet half of the table. "You don't look very excited, Julia."

"I heard the speech like fifty times," said Julia dryly. "It's gets wearying after a while. Anyway, I don't think he got it quite right."

" *Why* ?" asked Ron, Hermione and Ginny at once.

"If we make people who can weave in and out of the Magic world and Muggle world the *cool* people, what about people like *Hagrid* ?" she said, pointing her chin at the opposite side of the pub.

They looked and saw the back of Hagrid's enormous shaggy head. Hagrid had his usual enormous tankard in front of him and he was leaning low to talk to Remus. Remus noticed them at their corner and muttered something to Hagrid. The pair of them looked at their direction and waved cheerfully.

"All right there?" said Hagrid loudly.

The six of them waved back, smiling awkwardly. Then, slowly, they turned their attentions back to each other.

"It's not just Hagrid," said Julia quietly. "What about goblins, centaurs and House-elves? Where do they fit in?"

"And what if you're just not clever enough to learn muggle stuff?" said Neville gloomily. "I know I'm not."

"Don't call yourself that," said Ginny sharply. "You're not as stupid as everyone makes you out to be."

"You know how to use a computer," said Ron. "You can't say that about most of our kind."

Neville just shook his head. From the stricken look on Hermione's face and her silence, Harry could tell she knew why he was so. Harry, on his part, didn't say anything. Because his reason for not being impressed at Mr. Jeremy's ideas was guarantee to upset everyone: it wouldn't matter to him either way because he was going to be dead.

Yes, it was best not to say that.

Harry kept his silence until the afternoon when they returned to Hogwarts and he, Ron, Ginny and Julia played two-on-two Quidditch at the pitch; Harry and Julia against Ginny and Ron, Neville and Hermione watching. Ginny was good, Ron was decent, and Julia was an excellent flier, but rather inept at handling the Quaffle, so they were reasonably well matched.

After an enjoyable hour of throwing a Quaffle through the goal hoops-but no longer than that, least they trigger Madam Pomfrey's disobedient patient senses, to say nothing of Hermione's anxiety over Harry's EIA- the six of them headed back to the castle.

"What d'you think the first task is going to be about?" asked Ron.

"Well, Bagman said the reserve keepers are going to arrive this evening," said Hermione "Since he said reserve keeper, I'm thinking it will feature a magical beast. And the only magical beast that has its own reserve is…"

"… *Dragons*," Harry and Julia said together.

Neville paled and Ron whistled.

"Blimey, I don't envy Diggory right now," he said fervently.

"Should we tell Hagrid? You know how much he loves dragons," said Harry.

"He would know already, wouldn't he, since he's supposed to take you there?" said Hermione. "But let's go. We haven't visited Hagrid in ages."

They changed directions and headed to the edge of the Forbidden Forest, where Hagrid's cabin was located at. As they neared the one room cabin, they saw the gigantic powder-blue carriage the delegation from Beauxbatons had arrived in parked two hundred yards from Hagrid's front door. The elephantine flying horses that had pulled the carriage were now grazing in a makeshift paddock alongside it.

Harry knocked on Hagrid's door, and Fang's booming barks answered instantly.

"'Bout time!" said Hagrid, when he'd flung open the door. "Thought you lot'd forgotten where I live!"

"We've been really busy, Hag-" Hermione started to say, but then she stopped dead, looking up at Hagrid, apparently lost for words.

Hagrid was wearing his best (and very horrible) hairy brown suit, plus a checked yellow-and-orange tie. This wasn't the worst of it, though; he had evidently tried to tame his hair, using large quantities of what appeared to be axle grease and a comb. It was now slicked down into two bunches and Harry could see the comb's broken teeth tangled in it. The look didn't really suit Hagrid at all. For a moment, Hermione goggled at him, then, obviously deciding not to comment, she said, "Erm-where are the skrewts?"

"Out by the pumpkin patch," said Hagrid happily. "They're gettin' massive, mus' be nearly four foot long now. On'y trouble is they've started killin' each other."

"Oh no, really?" said Hermione, shooting a repressive look at Ron, who, staring at Hagrid's odd hairstyle, had just opened his mouth to say something about it.

"Yeah," said Hagrid sadly. "S' okay, though, I've got 'em in separate boxes now. Still got abou' fifteen."

"Well, that's lucky," said Ron. Hagrid missed the sarcasm.

They entered the cabin and sat down at the enormous wooden table that stood in front of the fire beneath the quantity of cured hams and dead birds hanging from the ceiling. Hagrid started to make tea, and soon they were immersed in discussions about the first task of the Triwizard Tournament. It soon became clear Hagrid knew what it was about.

"You wait," he said, grinning. "You jus' wait. Yer going ter see some stuff yeh've never seen before. Firs' task… ah, but I'm not supposed ter say."

"It couldn't be dragons, could it?" Ron said slyly, but Hagrid just shook his head, grinning.

They ended up having dinner with Hagrid, though they didn't eat much- Hagrid had made what he said was a beef casserole, but after Hermione unearthed a large talon in hers, she and everyone else lost their appetites. However, they enjoyed themselves trying to make Hagrid admit he knew about the dragons, speculating how the champions would react to them, and how they should film it.

By half past five it was growing dark, and everyone except Harry decided it was time to get back up to the castle. Harry of course had to stay behind to 'film' the first task preparations and told Hagrid as much.

"I'll come with yeh," said Hagrid, putting away his darning. "Jus' give us a sec."

There was an air of enormous excitement about Hagrid. As they watched, he put a flower that resembled an oversized artichoke into his buttonhole.

"Why the flower, Hagrid?" asked Julia.

"Got summat ter do," said Hagrid.

"Like what?" Harry said warily, wondering if the skrewts had laid eggs, or Hagrid had managed to buy another giant three-headed dog off a stranger in a pub, and he was off to celebrate the

occasion.

"Jus' come with me, keep quiet, an' keep yerself covered with yer cloak," said Hagrid. "We won' take Fang, he won' like it. The res' o' you should head back…"

"How do you even know I have my cloak?" Harry asked even as he took his Invisibility Cloak out from his messenger bag.

But Hagrid wasn't listening; he was opening the cabin door and striding off into the evening. The six of them looked out the window and found, to their great surprise, that Hagrid was heading to the Beauxbatons carriage.

"Why there?" said Hermione in amazement.

"And what's with the hair and the suit?" said Harry in an undertone.

" *Look* !" said Ron suddenly, pointing out of the window.

Getting to their feet very cautiously, so that Hagrid wouldn't spot them, the six of them peered through the window and saw Hagrid knock three times on the door bearing the crossed golden wands.

Madame Maxime opened it. She was wearing a silk shawl wrapped around her massive shoulders. She smiled when she saw Hagrid. Hagrid beamed back at her, face pink and misty-eyed, and held out a hand to help her down the golden steps.

"He *fancies* her!" said Ron incredulously. "Well, if they end up having children, they'll be setting a world record-bet any baby of theirs would weigh about a ton."

"You better follow them now, Harry," said Julia as she watched Hagrid offer Madame Maxime his arm with horrified fascination. "Just don't ever tell me what you saw- *ever* ."

They let themselves out of the cabin and shut the door behind them. It was surprisingly dark outside. Ron, Hermione, Julia, Neville and Ginny headed back to the castle, and Harry, wrapped in his invisibility cloak, ran to keep up with Hagrid and Madame Maxime.

"Wair is it you are taking me, 'Agrid?" said Madame Maxime playfully.

"Yeh'll enjoy this," said Hagrid gruffly, "worth seein', trust me. On'y-don' go tellin' anyone I showed yeh, right? Yeh're not s'posed ter know."

"Of course not," said Madame Maxime, fluttering her long black eyelashes.

Harry sighed irritably as he jogged along in their wake. It was obvious to him Madame Maxime was milking Hagrid's regard for her for all its worth. Sherlock was absolutely correct about love turning people stupid(er).

They walked so far around the perimeter of the forest that the castle and the lake were out of sight. Then Harry heard something. Men were shouting up ahead… then came a deafening, earsplitting roar…

Hagrid led Madame Maxime around a clump of trees and came to a halt. Harry hurried up alongside them-for a split second, he thought he was seeing bonfires, and men darting around them-and then his mouth fell open.

Dragons.

Three fully grown, enormous, vicious-looking dragons were rearing onto their hind legs inside an enclosure fenced with thick planks of wood, roaring and snorting-torrents of fire were shooting into the dark sky from their open, fanged mouths, fifty feet above the ground on their outstretched necks. There was a silvery-blue one with long, pointed horns, snapping and snarling at the wizards on the ground; a red one with an odd fringe of fine gold spikes around its face, which was shooting mushroom-shaped fire clouds into the air; and a gigantic black one, more lizard-like than the others, which was nearest to them. At least thirty wizards, seven or eight to each dragon, were attempting to control them, pulling on the chains connected to heavy leather straps around their necks and legs. Mesmerized, Harry looked up, high above him, and saw the eyes of the black dragon, with vertical pupils like a cat's, bulging with either

fear or rage, he couldn't tell which. It was making a horrible noise, a yowling, screeching scream…

"Keep back there, Hagrid!" yelled a wizard near the fence, straining on the chain he was holding. "They can shoot fire at a range of twenty feet, you know! I've seen this Horntail do *forty* !"

"Is'n' it beautiful?" said Hagrid softly.

"It's no good!" yelled another wizard. "Stunning Spells, on the count of three!"

Harry saw each of the dragon keepers pull out his wand.

" *Stupefy* !" they shouted in unison, and the Stunning Spells shot into the darkness like fiery rockets, bursting in showers of stars on the dragons' scaly hides-

Harry watched the dragon nearest to them teeter dangerously on its back legs; its jaws stretched wide in a silent howl; its nostrils were suddenly devoid of flame, though still smoking - then, very slowly, it fell. Several tons of sinewy, scaly dragon hit the ground with a thud that Harry could have sworn made the trees behind him quake.

The dragon keepers lowered their wands and walked forward to their fallen charges, each of which was the size of a small hill. They hurried to tighten the chains and fasten them securely to iron pegs, which they forced deep into the ground with their wands.

"Wan' a closer look?" Hagrid asked Madame Maxime excitedly. The pair of them moved right up to the fence, and Harry followed. The wizard who had warned Hagrid not to come any closer turned, and Harry realized who it was: Charlie Weasley.

"All right, Hagrid?" he panted, coming over to talk. "They should be okay now - we put them out with a Sleeping Draft on the way here, thought it might be better for them to wake up in the dark and the quiet - but, like you saw, they weren't happy, not happy at all-"

"What breeds you got here, Charlie?" said Hagrid, gazing at the closest dragon, the black one, with something chose to reverence. Its eyes were still just open. Harry could see a strip of gleaming

yellow beneath its wrinkled black eyelid.

"This is a Hungarian Horntail," said Charlie. "There's a Swedish Short-Snout, that blue-grey and a Chinese Fireball, that's the red."

Charlie looked around; Madame Maxime was strolling away around the edge of the enclosure, gazing at the stunned dragons.

"I didn't know you were bringing her, Hagrid," Charlie said, frowning. "The champions aren't supposed to know what's coming-she's bound to tell her student, isn't she?"

"Jus' thought she'd like ter see 'em," shrugged Hagrid, still gazing, enraptured, at the dragons.

"Really romantic date, Hagrid," said Charlie, shaking his head.

"Three…" said Hagrid, "so it's one fer each o' the champions, is it? What've they gotta do - fight 'em?"

"Just get past them, I think," said Charlie. "We'll be on hand if it gets nasty, Extinguishing Spells at the ready. They wanted nesting mothers, I don't know why… but I tell you this, I don't envy the one who gets the Horntail. Vicious thing. Its back end's as dangerous as its front, look."

Charlie pointed toward the Horntail's tail, and Harry saw long, bronze-coloured spikes protruding along it every few inches.

Five of Charlie's fellow keepers staggered up to the Horntail at that moment, carrying a clutch of huge granite-grey eggs between them in a blanket. They placed them carefully at the Horntail's side. Hagrid let out a moan of longing.

"I've got them counted, Hagrid," said Charlie sternly. Then he asked. "Where is Harry? They told us he'd be here."

"Around," said Hagrid. He was still gazing at the eggs.

"I hope he doesn't have to get close when he does whatever he needs to do to record the champions facing this lot," said Charlie grimly, looking out over the dragons' enclosure. "I didn't dare tell

Mum what the first task was about; she just about fainted when Ron told her Harry was going to be the cameraman, and then exploded on Harry's mum for letting him do something so dangerous…"

Harry had had enough. Trusting to the fact that Hagrid wouldn't miss him, with the attractions of three dragons and Madame Maxime to occupy him, he turned silently and began to walk away, back to the castle.

… And almost ran into Karkaroff on the way back. Harry side-stepped quickly, and silently watched Karkaroff creep under under the cover of the trees and edged forward toward the place where the dragons were.

Harry had no doubt whatsoever what Karkaroff was up to. He had sneaked off his ship to try and find out what the first task was going to be. He might even have spotted Hagrid and Madame Maxime heading off around the forest together - they were hardly difficult to spot at a distance. And now all Karkaroff had to do was follow the sound of voices, and he, like Madame Maxime, would know what was in store for the champions. By the looks of it, the only champion who would be facing the dragon without warning on Tuesday was Cedric.

Harry felt rage roiling up his gut at once. Cedric could easily *die* armed with nothing but his wand against a fifty-foot-high, scaly, spike-ridden, fire-breathing dragon. Without any warning or preparation. With everyone watching. Like his death was some exciting show. DAMN IT!

Harry checked his watch. Dinner was almost over now, and he had no idea where Cedric might be. But he had to do something.

Harry hurried over to castle. As luck would have it, Cedric was leaving the Great Hall by himself. Harry quietly followed him until they'd reached the third floor corridor, which was empty of everyone but himself and Cedric. There Harry took off his invisibility cloak, stuffed it quickly back into his messenger bag, and called out:

" *Hey* !"

Cedric flinched a bit before turning. He started when he realised who called him.

"Hi," said Cedric warily. "Can I help you?"

"Cedric," said Harry, "the first task is dragons."

Cedric blinked.

" *What* ?" he said.

"Dragons," said Harry, speaking quickly in case someone might enter the hall. "They've got three, one for each champion, and you got to get past them."

Cedric stared at him. Harry saw the panic flickering in Cedric's grey eyes.

"Are you sure?" Cedric said in a hushed voice.

"Dead sure," said Harry. "I've seen them."

"But how did you find out? No one is supposed to know."

"Never mind," said Harry - because he wasn't supposed to tell anyone and if anyone found out what he was doing, he was going to be in trouble. "But I'm not the only one who knows. Fleur and Krum will know by now. Maxime and Karkaroff both saw the dragons too."

Cedric stared at Harry, and there was a puzzled, almost suspicious look in his eyes.

"Why are you telling me?" he asked.

Harry wasn't sure how he was supposed to respond. He had far too many reasons, and not all them he could say.

"… It's just fair," he finally said. "And I wouldn't let even my worst enemy face a dragon unprepared."

Cedric still looked at him in a slightly suspicious way. Harry decided he'd done his part.

"That's all," he said. "Good luck on Tuesday. Hope you do well."

And with that, Harry walked away.

Final Notes : I *had* written a version of this chapter last week, but I hated it. So I scraped it and wrote it again. And *again.* This is the version that struck the best chord… and I'm still not quite satisfied. :(This has to be the longest chapter I wrote for ASIM…

In my head, Harriet Watson was a Royal Marine. John and Harry had an intense but mostly friendly rivalry over their respective military careers until Harry retired from the military and John was medically discharged.

I had to wonder how the Ministry of Magic regulates businesses for this chapter. There wasn't a lot to go on. Diagon Alley is full of mom-and-pop shops, and Fred and George started their private mail-order business without having to go through Ministry of Magic, and it didn't look like they had to declare the WWW as a legal business entity when opened their brick-and-mortar shop. Considering the primary business of the MoM is keeping magic secret and how loose they are about *other* laws, I figure if wizards and witches pay income and property tax, all business earnings minus qualified expenses would count as income and business estate as property, thus taxed that way. This doesn't cover corporations or conglomerates, but the HP-verse doesn't appear to have them.

Hermione is sharp about any kind of superiority agenda, but in one area she has a blind-spot: intelligence. She is extremely brainy, and is impatient towards people who are not as brainy as she. Jeremy's ideas flatter her natural inclination towards intelligence/cleverness so she wasn't as critical to them.

Turning Point

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Five: Turning Point

Sirius was often asked about his part in the strange ménage that was 221B Baker Street by those involved in law enforcement and knew of Sherlock Holmes. On the particular Saturday it was Molly Hooper, pathologist of Barts, who asked the question.

"Slave," Sirius eventually answered.

Ms. Hooper's pretty eyes went very round. " *Really* ?" she squeaked.

"Indentured court wizard, to be more accurate," Sirius elaborated. "Sometimes I'm the pet dog."

Ms. Hooper blinked several times as she looked askance at Sirius, apparently uncertain as to whether she was talking to a madman or a jokester. Sirius put on his most charming grin to push the assessment towards the former.

"… Okay," Ms. Hooper muttered, looking down at her bundle of notes. "So, um, Sherlock wants you to see Eric Judson? That's- I mean, he usually wants to look at the bodies in person."

"Normally, yes, but Himself is a bit leery of leaving his baby boy at

the moment."

Ms. Hooper looked at him again, startled. Then her expression slowly turned equal parts wry and wistful.

"So they really had a baby," she said quietly, almost to herself. "I heard about it, but I didn't think they'd really-"

That moment, Sirius's mobile vibrated. He pulled a face as he opened the call.

" *Yeah* ?" Sirius grouched to the phone.

Sirius listened to the demands.

" *No* . Hell, no, I'm not doing it!" growled Sirius. "You sent me to Thailand for two weeks. You don't get to order to me to tail someone until I get my downtime. Oh, you think I'm being unreasonable? Let's see what you think when I turn you into a pig! And yes, I *will* do it!"

Sirius continued to rant whilst shaking a fist in the air. From the corner of his eye, Sirius noticed Ms. Hooper was staring at him in amazement.

"I'm not your food delivery boy either; order Chinese yourself," he grumbled. "No, you can't use that excuse. John isn't… *What* ?! Oh, bloody hell, *fine*…"

Sirius ended the call, stuffed his mobile back in his pocket and fumed. Ms. Hooper gave him a sympathetic smile.

"He's hard to say no to," she said understandingly.

"I can say no to him just fine; it's actually NOT doing what he wants I have trouble with," Sirius growled. "Listen: Showing me the body is against the rules, isn't it? *Then don't do it.* He can bloody well come here himself."

Ms. Hooper withdrew her smile and looked away.

"Actually, if you can just take a look now, I'd…"

Sirius studied Ms. Hooper for a moment. From the way she carried herself to the way she reacted to the phone call spoke of a long history of Sherlock abuse. Sirius was instantly gripped with a strong desire to make it up for her.

"Hey, do you want to go grab some coffee? I'll show you magic."

Ms. Hooper hesitated. " *Magic* ?" she repeated uncertainly.

"Real magic," said Sirius, grinning (invitingly, he hoped).

At length, Ms. Hooper smiled back.

"Okay."

Ms. Hooper took Sirius to the canteen after giving him a brief view of late Eric Judson, whose cause of death was simply listed Unknown ("Other than the fact he's dead, there literally nothing that can tell us *why*," Ms. Hooper explained). Once they sat down with coffees, Sirius conjured a flock of canaries-with a lot of theatrical hand-waving and gesturing to make it look Muggle-worthy.

"Don't magicians use pigeons, usually?" said Ms. Hooper as she stared open-mouthed at the yellow birds twittering around her.

"Pigeons are boring," said Sirius loftily. "So tell me about yourself."

Ms. Hooper smiled nervously. "Well, I've worked here for six years, and I have a cat named Toby and… um, that's about it. I'm kind of boring."

"That's okay. I'm very boring, too," said Sirius magnanimously. "At least you've done something with your life. I spent a good chunk of mine wrongfully convicted of murder."

Ms. Hooper gasped.

"That's how I met Sherlock, by the way; he proved I didn't do it and found the real murderer," Sirius said.

"That sounds just like him, he's really brilliant like that," said Ms. Hooper brightly. "So you've been helping him since… umm, getting

out?"

"Pretty much."

They swapped Sherlock stories. Sirius quickly gathered Sherlock regularly haunted St. Barts for his cases, research or no discernible reason, and Molly Hopper was his favourite on-site victim/ accomplice/chew-toy. He also found reason to be thankful for the remarkably short life-span of news in the Muggle world - or the fact no one watched BBC News Channel - because Molly registered no recognition when he finally told her his name.

" *Sirius* ? Like the satellite radio?"

"The star, actually," said Sirius. "My family was crazy about constellations. I had an uncle named Cygnus and my favourite cousin is Andromeda."

Molly bit on her lower lip and grinned.

"Have I mentioned my father's name is Orion?"

Molly started giggling helplessly. Sirius felt triumphant over achieving this feat.

Sirius shared a few more egregious examples of his family's tendency to name their children after stars, whose lofty fame and brightness they were supposed to embody (*ha*). He refrained, of course, from mentioning Cousin Araminta Meliflua, who tried to force through a Ministry Bill to make Muggle-hunting legal, and resolutely refused to confirm the existence of cousin Bellatrix, who more than lived up to her name in a decidedly twisted manner.

"Try to guess what my little brother's name is," said Sirius. "You can use your smartphone."

Molly eagerly thumb typed on her mobile phone. A few clicks later she had a long list of potential names.

"Vega!" she guessed after skimming the first few items.

Sirius shook his head, amused, "Nope."

"Pollux?" Molly tried again.

"That's my Grand-uncle," said Sirius.

"Mmm… Betelgeuse?" said Molly as she reconsidered her options.

Sirius laughed. "Even *my* parents weren't that cruel."

"Oh. Well, um, what about Agena? No that sounds like a girl's name, doesn't it? Mmmn… Rigel?"

"Close."

Molly frowned down at her mobile's screen.

"Rigil Kentaurus?"

"Think 'R'."

Molly scrolled down until she reached:

" *Regulus* ?"

Sirius gave her a thumbs-up.

Molly was beaming brightly when Sirius's mobile started vibrating non-stop for a whole minute.

"Oh, hell," Sirius groaned, pulling out his mobile phone. As expected, there were a growing number of texts demanding his attention. "Sorry, I have to dash; his lordship is demanding my presence."

"Okay," said Molly, her smile shrinking a bit. "That was a lot of fun. Thank you. Um, would you like to-" but then she stopped, and the lingering smile faded completely, "-never mind. Can you tell John congratulations?"

Sirius was too familiar with this form of backtracking, though he didn't know what caused it. Impulsively, Sirius conjured a bouquet of daisies behind his back.

"Sure. And I had fun too," he said, taking out the bundle of flowers.

"Here, take this."

For several seconds Molly just stared at the bouquet like she didn't how she was supposed to react. At length she took them, and looked Sirius over the petals.

"Let's do this again," said Sirius, winking, "Text me."

Then leaving his business card on the table, Sirius went on his way.

Sirius checked his messages on his way back to Baker Street. He was entirely unsurprised at the fact Sherlock had figured out what he was doing. What *did* surprise him, though, was Sherlock's threat to have him hanged, drawn and quartered (among other horrible things) if his intentions were dishonest. The last message was the most ominous:

John will help me. SH

Sirius Apparated directly to the flat after picking up Chinese. Sherlock and John were at their favourite spot in 221B when he materialized: before the fireplace, sitting in their respective armchairs, side by side.

"I meant it," Sherlock said whilst signing to Benedict on his lap.

"You're very welcome," Sirius snapped.

"Welcome back," said John. "Had any trouble?"

"Aside from the food, mosquitos and murderous locals, no, not really." Sirius tossed a keychain to John. "Here, have a souvenir."

"Oh, these are so cute," said John as she held up the keychain, which had a white elephant ornament made of lotus-patterned fabric. "Jackie would love these."

"Grandmaster Shin's younger daughter?" asked Sirius as he set down the takeaway on the sitting room table.

"Yep," said John. "She *loves* elephants; been in love with them since watching Dumbo as a kid."

"Learn something new every day," said Sirius, smirking. "Now you two better eat these, because you've basically threatened my life over it."

John nodded, "Ta."

John and Sherlock (and baby) eventually moved to the sitting room table. Sherlock reviewed the candid photo of Eric Judson's autopsy report Sirius had sneakily took whilst viewing his body, and Sirius and John ate dinner whilst chatting about Molly Hooper. John said she and Lestrade had tried to set Molly up with John's cousin Rory last year, but it didn't work out-Molly couldn't get over the family resemblance, a huge stumbling block for someone who used to harbor a crush on Sherlock, and Rory had leftover feelings for his old girlfriend, Amy.

"Definitely the Killing Curse," Sherlock concluded, tossing the photographed report away carelessly.

"Is this the guy you sent me to Thailand for?"

"He's the dead middleman drug-dealer, yes," said Sherlock. "The wizard who actually committed the crime is still at large."

"How far are you in finding him?"

"John, you explain," said Sherlock, turning his attention back to Benedict.

John told Sirius about 'Parker', the military man who likely had a long history of using magic for muggle crime (and the man Sherlock wanted him to tail). John also explained what Harry and his friends were doing per Dumbledore's request, and what John had advised them to do to find the identity of Voldemort's new agent.

"So you think this agent was likely involved in an early, botched attempt to revive Voldemort," said Sirius grimly. "Well, I definitely know the people who got caught trying."

" *Who* ?" John asked keenly, Sherlock also looking up in deep interest.

"The Lestranges: a married couple and the husband's younger brother; they're still in Azkaban," said Sirius. "And Crouch's only son was caught in their company."

John blinked, and Sherlock's interest sharpened.

"Barty Crouch had a *son* ?"

"That's right," said Sirius. "Mind, he may not have been a death eater at all; just at the wrong place at the wrong time. Anyway, I saw the dementors bringing him in through the bars in my cell door. He can't have been more than nineteen. They took him into a cell near mine. He was screaming for his mother by nightfall. He went quiet after a few days, though… they all went quiet in the end… except when they shrieked in their sleep…"

Sirius went still. He was back in his old cell in Azkaban, breathing the cold, salty air of the Northern Sea. A chill was seeping into his skin, and the hollow scream of a fellow prisoner was ringing in his ears…

Then some unaccounted time later he was back in the present, back in London.

"So he's still in Azkaban?" John asked, after Sirius recovered from the onslaught.

"… No," said Sirius dully. "No, he's not in there anymore. He died about a year after they brought him in."

"He *died* ?"

"He wasn't the only one," said Sirius bitterly. "Most go mad in there, and plenty stop eating in the end. They lose the will to live. You could always tell when a death was coming, because the dementors could sense it, they got excited. That boy looked pretty sickly when he arrived. Crouch being an important Ministry member, he and his wife were allowed a deathbed visit. That was the last time I saw Barty Crouch, half carrying his wife past my cell. She died herself,

apparently, shortly afterward. Grief. Wasted away just like the boy. Crouch never came for his son's body. The dementors buried him outside the fortress; I watched them do it."

Sherlock frowned at this bit of information. John merely jotted it down on a page inside a one-inch binder.

"What was the son's name?" John asked.

"Bartemius Crouch, Jr."

"Do you know what he and the Lestranges did to try and bring LV back?"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. "No idea. But knowing the Lestranges, nothing quiet or peaceful."

John hummed. "Crouch must've had huge political fallout when his son got convicted."

"You got that right," said Sirius. "One moment, a hero, poised to become Minister of Magic; next, his son dead, his wife dead, family name dishonoured, and since my exoneration, a big drop in popularity. Once the boy had died, people started feeling a bit more sympathetic toward the son and started asking how a nice young lad from a good family had gone so badly astray. The conclusion was that his father never cared much for him. So Cornelius Fudge got the top job, and Crouch was shunted sideways into the Department of International Magical Cooperation."

"Where he has been to this day," muttered Sherlock.

There was a bit of silence while John chewed thoughtfully on a spring-roll and Sherlock brooded over the data, his chin deep in his chest, against which Benedict was snuffling.

"Things keep coming back to Crouch," said John at length. "Pettigrew's escape, Winky's sacking… now you're saying his late son might've been involved in an early LV revival attempt. *But*…"

"… It doesn't go anywhere from there," said Sherlock in a low voice. "The son was perhaps involved, but he's dead. Unlikely Crouch

associated with Voldemort or any of his supporters following the scandal. It's not as if he *could.* "

"He's not very popular to those people," agreed Sirius.

"And yet the person who helped Pettigrew escape was in *Crouch's home* the day it happened," Sherlock went on. "Pettigrew couldn't have known Grandmaster Shin would contact Crouch if and when he was discovered. Very few people knew Crouch had asked Shin to keep him abreast of developments, and even less people expected Shin to honour the request. Therefore Pettigrew couldn't have planned his escape with Crouch's guest beforehand. It is far more likely the guest acted on impulse at the unexpected news. But who is this guest? Who would Crouch invite to Christmas? Where is this guest now? Is he Voldemort's second agent? If he is, how did he infiltrate the ministry? Unless I'm much mistaken, there are four possibilities."

Sherlock took one of the brown paper bags Sirius brought from the Chinese restaurant and started scribbling.

"Possibility one: Voldemort is controlling someone directly.

"Possibility two: The agent is an unregistered Animagus, sneaking in and out of the ministry as needed.

"Possibility three: The agent is using the Polyjuice Potion to impersonate someone in the ministry.

"Possibility four: the agent is using the Imperius Curse to manipulate a ministry employee."

Sherlock recapped his pen after he finished writing, and then set the bag for all to see.

"We can eliminate possibility one, considering Voldemort is no longer a disembodied spirit," he said. "That leaves the latter three options. The agent could've used any combination of these three to reach the Goblet of Fire and Confund it. He would have had plenty of opportunities. The goblet was left out in the open for twenty-four hours. Anyone who has access to Hogwarts could've gone up done

it."

"Under Dumbledore's watch, when he's expectingpeople to try and hoodwink it?" said Sirius sceptically.

"The possibility isn't zero," said Sherlock. "Of course, the agent could've done it *before* the goblet was brought into Hogwarts. That limits the pool of suspects to the ministry personnel who transported the goblet."

"Bagman and Crouch," said John.

"Precisely," said Sherlock. "Now it's not beyond the realm of possibility Bagman is being manipulated. His ability to Confund a powerful magical object like the Goblet, however, is questionable. Crouch has the *ability* judging from his past history in the Magical Law Enforcement, and we also know he was Imperiused to help Pettigrew escape once. But Crouch has been under tight surveillance since then. The agent would've had a hard time reaching him, even if he wanted to use Crouch. Also, the chances of Crouch not reporting the guest's return are very, very slim."

There was a short pause.

"What about Bertha Jorkins?" Sirius asked. "Isn't she still missing?"

"Yes, the keyword being: *missing*," said Sherlock with awful sarcasm. "In other words, *she's not here* ."

"She went on a holiday to Albania," Sirius argued. "That was the last place Voldemort was known to be before Peter escaped."

"Even if she did meet Voldemort in Albania, she didn't return for work," snapped Sherlock. "So she can't be the one the agent is manipulating or impersonating right now."

There was another pause.

"I'm missing something," Sherlock muttered, "A vital piece of information that would reshape the whole case. I just can't see what it could be…"

Abruptly, he turned to John and Sirius.

"Get out," he said. "I need to think. You might talk."

"I need to feed Benedict," said John calmly.

Sherlock shoved Benedict into John's arms.

"Bedroom. Stay there," he said curtly. To Sirius he said, "You: out."

John and Sirius went downstairs to 221C. There John fed Benedict and updated Sherlock's index of Death Eaters (each labelled with a status: confirmed/suspected/incarcerated/at large/dead) whilst listening to Sirius bitch about Sherlock.

"Seriously, why'd you marry him?" Sirius complained.

"To keep him alive," said John. At Sirius's incredulous expression, John added, "It makes sense in context."

"… *There's a context where that makes sense* ?!" howled Sirius.

"Yes," said John simply. "Now take a look at this. Are we missing anyone?"

John handed the index to Sirius for him to inspect. Sirius went through the names, grumbling.

"You missed my little brother," said Sirius after reading through.

"Your brother was a Death Eater?" said John, surprised.

Sirius nodded grimly. "Yep. The idiot was soft enough to believe joining Voldemort would make him a right little hero in the family."

John looked at him for a moment. "Your parents were into blood-purity?"

"They were convinced that to be a Black made you practically royal," said Sirius, rolling his eyes. "Never became Death Eaters themselves, but believe you me, they thought Voldemort had the right idea. They weren't alone, either. There were quite a few

people, before Voldemort showed his true colours, who thought he had the right idea about things… Most got cold feet when they saw what he was prepared to do to get power, though."

"So what happened to him?"

"Murdered by Voldemort. Or on Voldemort's orders, more likely; I doubt Regulus was ever important enough to be killed by Voldemort in person. From what I found out after he died, he got in so far, then panicked about what he was being asked to do and tried to back out. Well, you don't just hand in your resignation to Voldemort. It's a lifetime of service or death."

John hummed thoughtfully.

"Mind if I put him in here?"

"Go ahead," said Sirius carelessly.

John scribbled down 'Black, Regulus' under the 'B' section. After writing down the accompanying notes detailing his demise, John closed the index shut.

"I'm going to put him to bed," said John, adjusting Benedict. "Are you okay waiting here? Harry said he'd stop by, but I'm not sure if he's coming today or tomorrow-full moon and all that."

"I'll be fine," said Sirius. "I'll send Harry up once he gets here."

"Thanks."

John went upstairs.

Harry stumbled out of the fireplace a few hours later, just before the full moon rose above the city's skyline.

"Hi Sirius," said Harry breathlessly. "Remus will be here in a minute."

Sure enough, the fire turned green again, and Remus stepped out from the flames.

"Hello. Thought I'd better spend the night here," he said briskly. "Harry caught a bunch of students milling about in the Defence Corridor, spying on my office."

"They suspect?" said Sirius, alarmed.

"They suspect *something*," said Remus wryly. "My guess is they're wondering why Jacqueline visits my office in the evenings."

Sirius was very intrigued. "Oooh, why does she?"

"Here are some hints. One: she only visits during the full moon. Two: I'm supposed to learn how to duplicate myself. Three: she isn't sure if a werewolf's clone will transform during the full moon."

Sirius was disappointed. "Oh."

Sirius was cleaning up the soot on the floor when Remus suddenly went rigid. Then his limbs began to shake.

"Go," said Sirius to Harry. "I'll keep him company."

Even as he spoke, Remus's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws.

Sirius quickly transformed into a dog as the werewolf went down on all fours, back arched up. Then, trembling and whining, it curled up on the floor. Sirius quietly sidled next to it.

Harry covered the two with a warm blanket. Then, after patting the werewolf's head, he whispered a soft goodnight and padded out of the flat.

Harry climbed up to 221B after locking the door to 221C. He found Sherlock marching up and down the length of the sitting room, deep in thought, so he quietly detoured to the first floor bedroom.

He backtracked to the bathroom when he found John bathing Benedict.

"Hi, Harry," said John, looking back and smiling tiredly. "Sorry, but can you fetch a fresh nappy?"

Harry brought the requested item from the baby cabinet. Benedict, who hated baths, flailed and squalled noisily in his infant bathtub until John lifted him out of the water, dripping, and started drying him.

"There you go, you're all clean and fresh," said John, patting Benedict's balding head dry.

John put Benedict in his co-sleeper after dressing him again. But Benedict was not interested in sleeping, and kept rolling from side to side, yowling like a cat.

"Can you please sleep?" John pleaded.

Harry carried Benedict around in the darkened bedroom, hoping the change of hands would encourage him to sleep. John fell into an exhausted sleep as he did so, and didn't wake up when a rip appeared in the middle of thin air and Dr. Robert Ju poked his head out from the narrow opening.

"Hello," said Dr. Ju. "Earl's wake is today, but your mother wasn't responding to my emails…"

"She's sleeping," said Harry as he adjusted his hold around Benedict. "Who's Earl?"

"One of the guys from Iraq-" Dr. Ju blinked at Harry. "You have no idea what I'm talking about."

Harry shook his head. John never talked about Iraq, and turned stonily silent whenever someone asked. Only Sherlock knew the story, and he never talked about it either.

"Then I won't tell you," said Dr. Ju. "Can you wake her up? She shouldn't miss this."

Reluctantly, Harry shook John awake.

"Earl's wake is today," said Dr. Ju without ceremony when John

blearily opened her eyes.

"Right now?" said John, startled.

"Mmmhmm."

John sighed deeply.

"Okay give me a minute. Harry, can you go with me?"

"Yeah," said Harry quickly. "Uh, should I wear black?"

"Yes," John said.

John, Harry and Benedict stepped through the rip in space after changing into all black (Benedict wearing a black baby-vest). Harry smelled ozone as he walked through. Then he found himself inside a very empty looking flat. There were no decorations or furniture, just white faux wood blinds over the windows. The hardwood floors looked dusty, and the egg-shell white walls were unnaturally clean. Harry wondered if Miss Jackie ever came here or if anyone actually lived here.

"My car's in the garage," said Dr. Ju as he shrugged on an overlarge, black corduroy jacket over his ugly white-and-black-paisley-patterned shirt. "There should be a car seat in the trunk. I'll drive."

They left the flat after Dr. Ju put on a black tie (it was very fat). The elevator took them all the way down to the basement garage. There Harry spotted a car he was certain belonged to Dr. Ju. The car was garish pink in colour and the overall design resembled a crouching frog - or an alligator's head. There were headlights on top of the bonnet, two pairs of bulging holes for lights on the car's steep chin, and the fender looked like skin rolls over knees.

"That is not my car," said Dr. Ju in an offended tone when John and Harry shared a look.

The car Dr. Ju actually owned wasn't much of an improvement to the pink, alligator's head-like car. John declared it looked like a dented orange tissue box. Harry personally thought it looked like a

brick propped on wheels.

Dr. Ju drove down a busy motorway. It was very strange to see all the cars driving on the right side. It suddenly occurred to Harry that he was in a foreign country illegally. No one else in the car seemed to be bothered by this, though. Benedict, for once, didn't cry after being strapped in a car seat. Harry assumed it was because Dr. Ju's car seat was equipped with a good cushioning charm. Indeed, Benedict only started wailing when John took him out of the car seat, after Dr. Ju parked his box-like car in a small church's parking lot.

Harry followed Dr. Ju into the sanctuary. John stayed behind in the lobby because Benedict wouldn't stop crying. All the pews were full of solemn-looking people dressed in black. There was a closed casket in the front, on top of a dais, which was surrounded by flower arrangements. The only sound he could hear was a hymn playing from the speakers and a woman's loud and broken weeping. The bulletin Dr. Ju picked up from the officiator's desk showed a grainy picture of a teenager wearing a jersey-he didn't look a day older than fourteen, though the birth date and death date printed beneath the photo told Harry Earl S. was nineteen when he died.

Suddenly the age struck Harry in the gut. Before he saw the picture, thought 'Earl' was an old American solider John once knew. But he was too young to have been in the war. So who was this person? How did John know him?

Harry read through the bulletin. The eulogy said Earl was the only son of Mr. and Mrs. S. He was survived by two older sisters, Ann and Vivian. The notice on the bottom said Vivian was unable to attend the wake as she was currently oversees touring as a military nurse, but will be present at the funeral.

Harry then studied the back of the bulletin. It was full of short comments written by people who'd known Earl S. Adrian B. said he was the kind of person who made fun of her pigtails in public, but then came back and told her he liked them in private. Tim K. mourned the fact Earl died just when things were looking up for him, and said he'd miss him very much. Some of the comments were noted as being copied from Facebook. The last was a lengthy one

that looked like it was written by Earl S's girlfriend. She reminisced the times they spent together, how happy he was whenever the Ravens won, and wrote about their plans to start living together. It was as though she was writing to someone who was still alive to read her words later. But then the long paragraph ended in a tearful ramble:

I wish I listened to you when you asked me to pick you up. Maybe you wouldn't be dead if I did. Why didn't you make me do what you wanted me to do like you always do?

Harry swallowed hard after he finished reading.

The service started promptly at eight. Harry didn't understand anything but the eulogy, because the vicar didn't speak English. But Harry didn't let his attention wander, conscious as he was of the sad occasion that brought him there, and listened to the incomprehensible words with rapt attention.

Finally vicar left the podium, and people were getting up. The woman who wept throughout the service stood next to her black-clad daughter, still crying noisily, as though stopping the tears was impossible.

Only then did Harry realise the woman was Earl S's mother.

Harry stayed in his seat, feeling like an intruder. Dr. Ju travelled to the front, hugging Mrs. S and awkwardly patting Ann S's head when she clung to him. Harry mouthed if they could leave when he returned, and Dr. Ju nodded.

Together they went to the lobby. John wasn't there. Harry assumed she was inside, among the queue of people wanting to share their condolences to Earl S's family.

Harry and Dr. Ju stood there in the lobby, neither looking nor speaking to each other.

"… Were they close?" Harry asked abruptly.

"To Earl, no," said Dr. Ju. "Hailey-your mother- has a lot of history with the older sister, Vivian."

"Oh."

There was another long moment.

"What did the vicar say?" Harry asked.

"He read Isaiah 62:8: *But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand* . Said it was Earl's favourite verse. He mentioned how strangely appropriate it was for the occasion, though we can't ask him why he liked it anymore."

Harry swallowed hard when he heard Ju say: ' *we can't ask him…* '

"D'you… where do you think he is now?"

Dr. Ju looked at Harry for a long time. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking from the set of his mouth and half-lidded eyes.

"You want to know where dead people go," said Dr. Ju. "You're wondering if you'll see John again after you die. You're wondering if there is a beyond."

Harry wet his lips and said nothing.

"What have people told you?" asked Dr. Ju.

"Professor Dumbledore said for a well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure," said Harry slowly. "I learned at chapel there's a heaven and hell. Sherlock says we're just gone."

"What do you think?" asked Dr. Ju again.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. Dr. Ju nodded twitchily.

"Got an organized mind?" he asked.

Harry shook his head. "No."

"Think *I've* got an organized mind?" Dr. Ju asked again.

Harry glanced at him from the side, wondering if he should speak the truth.

"You don't," said Dr. Ju, answering for him. "I agree with you. Even on a good day, my mind looks like a hurricane hit it after a massive earthquake."

Harry's lips quirked a bit.

"But for what it's worth, I've thought about death a lot," Dr. Ju said. "I don't mind sharing if you want to hear it."

"Okay," said Harry.

Dr. Ju looked around him. Then he beckoned Harry to follow. Harry did so, walking closely behind. Dr. Ju walked outside, into the cold November air, and sat down at a rickety park bench in the front garden, cross-legged. Then he patted the spot in next to him. Harry sat there and waited.

"There are people," Dr. Ju started, "both Magic and Muggle, who came back to life after being declared dead. What these people saw while dead don't agree. Some said they've seen their favourite singers or actors. Others have seen angels or dead family members waiting to escort them. Yet others found themselves in places that signify transition, like a boat or a train station. Very few people gain new information in this state, though some have gleaned greater insight into the facts they already know. From what I can tell, what a person sees during their near-death experiences seem to depend on what the person expects in death. Those who want to pass on peacefully experience a sense of peace. Those who don't want to be alone meet companions. Those who expect justice see themselves in a place they'd get it. Those who view death as a transition see themselves in a place that would take them elsewhere. So we can't tell for sure what it's like based on these accounts. But it does tell you what people long for in life and death."

Dr. Ju looked up to the dark night sky, dotted sparsely with stars.

"We hunger for a sense of wonder-things that make you go: ' *wow* '," he said. "Your brother Benedict will eventually learn to interpret the things that he can see, and the sights will make him go *wow* . He'll learn to eat more than just his mother's milk, and the new tastes will make him go *wow* . This world, which is so new to him, is full of

things that make him go *wow*… But as he grows older, it will get harder and harder to find things that can ' *wow* ' him. But that longing for wonder, it'll never go away. It's no wonder we hope after death there will great adventures to look forward to."

Harry nodded.

"We also hunger for *truth*," Dr. Ju went on. "Right now, you're feeling the need to know the truth about death. People telling you it's going to be alright just don't cut it. You know enough about what is at stake to realize what happens after you die will determine what you should do right now. If- *if* -Sherlock and, dare I say, Voldemort is correct and death is the end, then eat, drink and be merry, because when you die, you lose everything. If death really is the end, then Voldemort did the most reasonable thing in the world by keeping himself alive at all cost… even if that cost was murdering other people."

"But he *can't* be right!" said Harry hotly. "What about all those people who died because of him? And what about all the suffering he caused? All of it would be *meaningless* if he's right!"

" *If* he is right," Dr. Ju agreed. "You don't know for sure yet. And if you are honest, you can't deny you have personal reasons to want Voldemort to be wrong. But there are people who are convinced death is the end who aren't like Voldemort - very decent and likable people. Would you have had such a visceral reaction if Voldemort wasn't in the picture? Perhaps you'd agree to it because you like these people and you want them to be right."

Harry didn't know what to say. Would he have?

"See? All the more reason to believe truth in the absolute sense matters," said Dr. Ju quietly. "It matters so much we still hunger for it even when we don't like it. It's not always pleasant, truth. In fact it can be traumatizing. Take justice. Do you think it will ever be enough to just destroy Voldemort? Shouldn't he be *punished* for all people he murdered? Shouldn't he *pay* for the suffering he caused? If after death everything you've done in life just vanishes, then there's no such thing as justice. Voldemort won't be the only person who won't pay enough in life. For justice to be real, he must pay

even after he dies. But who can stand if we have to make an account for everything we've ever done? No idle thought, no idle word, nothing ever forgotten… If death isn't the end, and when you die you must give an account for your life, then doing the right thing all the time is of the utmost importance. Knowing what the right thing is to begin with is important too. And you can't expect your good deeds to cancel out your bad ones because frankly they're different currencies. This should be obvious if you think about it: No good deed you'll ever do will make up for a murder you've committed, because you can't bring the dead victim back. At best you just make it easier for your collateral, surviving victims to bear the cost. You can't ask for justice only when it's convenient for you. It must cut both ways, and no matter how you look at it, you'll get cut too. The truth, therefore, is traumatizing. And yet the hunger for truth remains.

"We also hunger for *love*," Dr. Ju continued. "We long for relationships: mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, friends, colleagues, teachers, girlfriends, boyfriends, spouses, children… the list goes on. It's not even enough to have had them once - we wish they continue *forever* . Beyond even the grave. The thought that death may be the eternal separator should be too hard bear.

"That's why we hunger for *security*," said Dr. Ju. "The older we get, and the less we are able to take care of ourselves, the more we need it. Don't you want the security of knowing your family will be taken care of? Don't you want the security of knowing you'll be acknowledged for doing the right thing, choosing to die rather than let Voldemort run rampant? Don't you want the security of knowing your sacrifice won't be in vain - that it won't be meaningless? Don't you want the security of knowing you'll be acknowledged that it was *wrong* for the world to demand you to make such a decision at age fourteen?"

" *Yes*," said Harry fervently, feeling immensely relieved now that the things that bothered him were spelled out.

"So here is where we stand," said Dr. Ju, drawing a circle with his forefinger. "A proper answer to life and death should address the human hunger for wonder, truth, love and security. Hand-waving any one of these is unacceptable, so don't you dare do it." He paused.

"You're in a crisis mode right now because Voldemort is an unavoidable problem that gets more urgent with each passing day, and what you should do about it is so intricately tied to having an answer to death, you feel overwhelmed - drained."

Harry nodded painfully.

"So why don't I do this," said Dr. Ju. "I'll take the burden of carrying Voldemort's soul fragment. That way you can focus on defeating him."

Harry forgot how to breathe.

For a while he just stared, open-mouthed, as his heart pounded like a racing train. This - this was what he wanted, more than anything. Though he knew what Dr. Ju taking the burden of carrying Voldemort's soul fragment meant, being without the burden was something Harry wanted so badly, he couldn't even consider refusing the offer.

But…

"It can be done?" he squeaked.

"Getting rid of the magic in a soul fragment may be an unknown thing, but transferring a soul fragment from one human vessel to another human vessel is an ancient, well-established art," said Dr. Ju, smiling crookedly. "Grandmaster Shin already knows how to do it. He'll do it if I ask him. Afterwards, God willing, Jackie and I will figure out how to kill just the soul fragment."

"But what if it doesn't work?" Harry murmured. "What about your family?"

"I don't have any," said Dr. Ju. "My biological parents abandoned me when I was a baby. The closest thing to a mother I had as a child has refused to see me since I was seven. As a Buddhist monk seeking nirvana, she couldn't afford to keep anything that would generate craving, namely me. My adoptive parents are dead. It's been years."

Harry felt terrible.

"What about your friends?"

"Don't have a lot of those," said Dr. Ju wryly. "I'm not good at making them or keeping them."

Harry started to shake from head to toe.

"What about… Miss Jackie?" he said in a trembling voice. "Aren't you two together?"

Dr. Robert blinked several times at the sky, his eyes too bright.

"… We're not together anymore," he mumbled. "We agreed there's no point in courting if we can't get married for sure," he closed his eyes. "If we got married now, we'll be too distracted. Your life is too important to risk it."

"But you two were… I mean…"

"I hope you're not asking me to have the conversation I *think* you want me to have with your mother," said Dr. Robert, looking down at Harry with a horrible, twisted smile. " ' *Because I am far too invested in my romantic life to lose it, I'm going to let your son carry the burden of housing Voldemort's soul fragment and leave him to potentially die, even though I can do it better.'* " He snorted. "I'd be dead before I finish talking."

Harry wiped his steaming eyes.

"But… *why* ?" he choked.

Why are you doing this for me? I've never been kind to you. I made fun of you today. I don't care enough about you to refuse. In fact I'm relieved that it's you *who will be doing it and not someone like John…*

"Why not?" said Dr. Robert, grinning lopsidedly. "I'm fine about dying. Really, I am. The best thing about being Christian is that I belong to *Jesus* . The only God in the world who cared enough about his creatures that he became *one of us* in the fullest sense in real space time history; spared himself no suffering in order to have personal experience of being a creature living in a broken world -

including ignoble death on a cross; God enough to promise he'd do it thousands of years beforehand, then went ahead and did it, par excellence; God enough to die in my place to pay for all the wrong I've done and will do; God enough to triumph over the grave by bodily resurrecting." He sighed contentedly. "I'm well loved. I'm well taken care of. No suffering I ever go through will ever be meaningless because he counts them all and redeems them all. There's nothing at all for me to worry about. I have the answer."

He wrapped an arm around Harry's shaking shoulders and squeezed one tightly.

"Let the one who *can* do the heavy lifting," he said.

After Harry recovered and John made her presence known, Dr. Robert performed a magical vow. Harry felt the magic burning into his veins as Dr. Robert wrote something with his blood directly on the inner side of his right forearm. The blood glowed eerily against his skin before vanishing.

"Not a full-blown Unbreakable Vow, but close enough," he said. "I figured you'll need the assurance that I'll really do it."

John looked at Dr. Robert stonily.

"Robert-"

"Go love your husband," Dr. Robert interrupted.

"I know I'm not your wife," said John wryly. "You've been telling me that since we were engaged. Just answer me this: what about *you?* "

"What about me?" Dr. Robert asked, frowning, like John was speaking utter nonsense.

"You know what I mean."

"No, I really don't."

John sighed deeply. "Would getting married now really cause that much distraction? Knowing the two of you, I seriously doubt it."

" *Yes*," said Dr. Robert bluntly. "How could it *not* ?"

John sighed again. "Can you promise me not to do something stupid like never seeing each other?"

"Not seeing each other would be a good idea, considering, but we can't," said Dr. Robert seriously. "We still need to work out the *bu-dong* spell."

" *Good*," John growled. "That's a relief. You guys are so stupid, it's giving me heartburn."

"We cause you stomach problems?"

" *Yes* !" John shouted. "You and Jackie are bad for my health! If it's not acid reflux, it's freaking ulcers! Christ alone knows how I'll cope until you two settled down like normal human beings!"

Dr. Robert pulled a face.

"Don't give me that look," John snapped. "Don't bother with your stupid car. Send us back to London now. I might flood your chest with snot and feelings if you don't hurry up."

Dr. Robert swiftly created a magical rip. John clutched Benedict in one arm, Harry in the other, and marched towards it, not once turning to look at Dr. Robert.

"Thank you so much, you f-ing idiot," John snarled.

"Please stop tarnishing your soul," Dr. Robert chided. To Harry, he wiggled his fingers and said, "See you."

John and Harry stepped through the hole.

Then they stood quietly in the silence of 221B. It wasn't a complete silence, of course; Benedict was snoring against John, the sound of traffic filtered through the windows, and they could hear Sherlock marching up and down, up and down in the sitting room. Same as

usual, really.

Except everything had changed. Nothing was the same. Already Harry could feel his heart hardening, grow firm and focused, as he became inexplicably but inexorably *angry*…

Angry at Voldemort, for causing this ugly mess… Angry at *himself* for dithering around and wallowing in self-pity, when he wasn't the only one suffering…

Angry for a certain idiot, who thought it worthwhile to die for him…

"… Idiot," muttered John, glaring at nothing. "That effing *idiot*…"

Harry balled his fists.

Until Dr. Robert can marry Miss Jackie, Harry vowed, *I'll never, ever date* .

Final Notes : I've been very sick all of last week. Apparently I can write in spite of a raging fever, congested nose, coughs threatening to expel a lung and joint pains when the subject is funny enough. Writing Sirius and Molly was a *riot* . Weird pairings, ahoy! #itmakesnosense #wtheckBOC #stopwritingwhenyouresick #seriously

Amusement aside, the key thing of this chapter was the wake. I debated if I should remove the part Harry vowing to never date until he gets rid of Voldemort (in effect), but it was exactly the kind of impulsive but instinctively right thing he'd do, so I kept it. Harry's focus is in full swing, now that the burden of being a Horcrux is taken away. Voldemort best be on his toes…

Desirable Delays

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Six: Desirable Delays

The next morning Harry woke up with a sense of unease ossifying his stomach. He didn't have to think long to realise the cause of his unease was his choice to accept Dr. Robert's offer to take Voldemort's soul fragment from him. Harry had only felt relief when it was offered, but now, in the bright morning of day, he had to wonder if he was taking the easy way out. The idea that he might have acted cowardly was repulsive to him. But if he had been, was it too late to take his choice back? Dr. Robert had performed a magical vow, and it didn't feel like something he could break. Moreover, the idea of returning to the bleak state he'd been in for that last two weeks made him shudder.

Harry was still contemplating his choice when he came downstairs.

Dobby was bustling around in the kitchen, cooking and preparing an enormous breakfast as he always did on the days he came to do 221B's housework. John was overseeing Dobby and the coffee brewing (Dobby had trouble using the coffee maker-his magic usually sent the machine up in smoke). Sherlock wasn't marching around in the sitting room, but seated at the table. There were two small feverish spots on his hollow cheeks, but his eyes twinkled, and he seemed a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous

night.

"Did you sleep?" Harry asked as he sat down.

"No," said Sherlock in low rumble. "I was thinking."

"I wondered," said John ironically as she carried three steaming mugs to the table. "So do you have an idea now?"

"I think I have the key of the affair," said Sherlock. "By the way, John, I think you're standing in the presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. I deserve to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. But better late than never, mmm?"

"Sure. So what is it?" asked John, smiling.

"Harry's Hogwarts map," Sherlock answered. "It's obvious," he continued, seeing John and Harry's puzzled look. "Think from the agent's perspective: the Imperius Curse is the better option to maintain the day-to-day activities of the person he replaced. For operations that require a personal touch, using the Polyjuice potion or the Animagus spell makes more sense. The key lies in the latter type of operation. The agent needs to deliver Harry to Voldemort. We know he must since in Harry's vision, LV said 'there is still Harry Potter' in reference to feeding his snake, meaning he is expecting to have Harry in his clutches eventually. Therefore the agent must come within Harry's vicinity to deliver him to LV. The only time and place the agent can do so without raising suspicion is-"

"At Hogwarts, when the Triwizard tournament tasks are taking place," said Harry, comprehending at once. "The Marauder's map and my map shows what your real name is, whether you're disguised or not. The agent is the person who has the wrong name for their face."

"Precisely," said Sherlock, nodding. "So what should you do?"

"Get to know all the names of the people involved in the Triwizard tournament's first task and check if the name they give us matches the one that shows up on the map," Harry answered.

"Yes, and alert us and Dumbledore as soon as you see something

suspicious," said Sherlock.

Harry nodded once. "Okay."

"Have you never considered counter-intelligence as a career? Because that was absolutely fantastic," said John. "I thought the threat was just typical evil dark lord speak."

"Any career that involves too much interaction with Mycroft isn't one worth pursuing," said Sherlock loftily. "Besides, the long periods of wait between cases would certainly bore me to-"

That moment, Dobby came out of the kitchen.

"Dobby finished making breakfast!" he announced, his skinny arms trembling to hold aloft the large tray laden with toast, cooked eggs (hard-boiled, poached and fried), baked beans, porridge, orange quarters and melon slices.

"Thank you, Dobby," said John gratefully, taking the tray from him. Sherlock just rolled his eyes, as though the very presence of the food was making him lose his appetite.

"You're more focused," Sherlock remarked to Harry after Dobby bowed low and then returned to the kitchen. "Did something happen last night? You were absent for three hours, but you didn't leave through the door."

"We attended a wake," said John quietly without looking up.

Sherlock gave John a swift look.

"… *Ah*," he said.

He didn't ask for more details. Sherlock even nibbled on a bit of toast, though he was technically still on a case. Harry wasn't sure if John's answer had any relation to this abnormality.

After everyone finished eating-a lot left over, as usual-John and Harry prepared for chapel. Sherlock shocked them both by offering to look after Benedict while they were away. John blinked at Sherlock several times before saying:

"Thanks, but I was going to stop by Lestrade's afterwards."

"Why?"

"Ellen and Greg suggested Benedict and Isaac have a play date. They also wanted to ask me a bunch of questions."

"Magic?"

"Sort of. They wanted to know more about House-elves. Speaking of which: Dobby?"

Dobby immediately rushed into the sitting room, his right hand still clutching the dish towel he was using.

"What can Dobby do for Dr. Watson and Harry Potter?" he asked eagerly.

"Do you know anything about raising house-elf children?" asked John.

Sherlock's eyes went wide at the question. Harry just felt clueless.

"Ah, Dobby is very sorry, Dr. Watson, but Dobby is not knowing how to raise elf children," said Dobby, looking crestfallen. "Dobby was raised by his mother, like her mother before her, for such is the way of house-elves. Dobby was ordered to sire children, of course, by his old masters, but I has not seen any of them."

John worked on her jaw several times, stony-faced, and Harry was simply gobsmacked.

"You… house-elves don't have kids unless they're *ordered to* ?" John asked.

"Tis' part of the house-elf's enslavement, Dr. Watson, ma'am," said Dobby gravely. "A house-elf must always have master's permission before doing anything."

John stared at the ceiling, clenching and unclenching her hands.

"Right. Thank you, Dobby," said John in an admirably steady voice.

"You know, creating a house-elf advocacy group might be a good idea," said John as she, Harry and Benedict rode the tube (Benedict in his enchanted sling). "Call it the Society Promoting House-elf Welfare or something…"

"What about the House-elf Liberation Front?" Harry said as he wondered if the man throwing strange looks at them was eavesdropping.

"That sounds too focused on their *liberation*, not their general welfare," said John. "Anyway, food for thought…"

They arrived on time for service. Harry checked Miss Jackie periodically while Vicar Brown preached on 1 Corinthians 15:26. He didn't see much that would hint at her real mood, but her inscrutable face was a sign she was keeping everything to herself. At any rate, Harry learned more from her organ playing than from her demeanour. He didn't think he was alone in hearing the strong undercurrent of sadness in the music.

Harry, John and Benedict met up with the Lestrades after the benediction. It was almost four months since Harry had seen Mrs. Lestrade and Julia's younger siblings, the last time being the day Isaac was released from the hospital for Mrs. Lestrade and the Quidditch World Cup for Julia's siblings. Harry was struck at how much Isaac had grown since then. He was also struck at how small Isaac was compared to Benedict, who at three month was wearing clothes for six-month-olds. But he was a cheerful and lively baby, shrieking and giggling whenever Mr. Lestrade buried his face in his tummy and made loud, raucous noises. No one would've guessed he almost died at birth.

Mr. Lestrade also looked different enough to startle Harry. All the hair on Mr. Lestrade's head was completely white now, including his eyebrows and stubble, and he was wearing dirty white trainers, old jeans, a frumpy grey jumper and a frayed brown coat. Though it wasn't the first time Harry had seen Mr. Lestrade in casual clothes, he was still surprised to see him in such attire. But then, Harry reasoned, no one in their right mind would show up to their parish dressed in stereotypical church attire considering it was located in the middle of South East Peckham. Quite a few members of the

congregation were either former gang-members or reforming gang-members from the neighbourhood who were new to the concept of Christian, thus had to be stopped from reverting to old habits, such as bludgeoning people with a two-by-four in a fit rage (usually with the shouted admonition: *What would Jesus do?!*).

"Nice modifications," said John, eyebrows raised, as everyone loaded into Mr. Lestrade's car. Much like Mr. Weasley's Ford Anglia, all parts of the interior were magically extended: the backseat was enlarged to easily accommodate five car-seats (infant and toddler) and two relatively small teenagers (Harry and Julia), and the front passenger seat was magically stretched so Mrs. Lestrade and John could sit next to each other comfortably.

"These aren't modifications," said Mr. Lestrade airily. "My teachers - who shall remain anonymous - put them on the car to demonstrate. The spells are still there because I don't how to take them off."

"Sure," said John, while Mrs. Lestrade giggled. "So have you figured out how to make your car run without petrol?"

"That's borderline illegal," said Mr. Lestrade in mock indignation. "But if you want my opinion to that strictly hypothetical question, it's actually quite easy; you just need first-year level charms."

John smirked.

They arrived at the Lestrades' flat in thirty minutes. It looked like an ordinary Muggle flat with a few exceptions. Toy cars, trucks and picture books that had moving illustrations were lying around the living room's linoleum floor. Two media racks full of DVDs were on the either side of a flat-screen television, and a rather battered looking beige leather couch lined the wall opposite to it with a glass-top coffee table in the front. Toy broomsticks were leaning against a corner, and a brightly coloured baby activity mat much like the one in 221B was next to the coffee table.

The adults gathered around the baby activity mat with Isaac and Benedict in tow. Harry was pulled into the boy's room by an excited Rupert Lestrade, who apparently was very keen to have a much older boy to play with. Martin Lestrade, on the other hand, was not

happy to have his biggest boy status usurped and showed his displeasure clearly on his face. Though he probably meant to look fierce, Harry thought his expression absolutely hilarious because it made him look like a six-year-old version of Mr. Lestrade whenever Sherlock was being himself at his worst.

The first thing Harry noticed when he stepped inside the boy's room - which was miraculously tidy - was a tiny creature about the height of two-year-old Elise Lestrade. It had long hands and feet, large bat-like ears, round green eyes the size of golf balls, and a disturbingly familiar long, pencil-shaped nose.

"Hello Treble," said Julia brightly, walking briskly past Harry, who was frozen on his spot. "Oh, you cleaned up the room, how very thoughtful of you!"

She lifted up the tiny House-elf standing on top of a plastic toy box and hugged it, cuddling the elf like she would a baby. The house-elf- the tiniest one Harry had ever seen- trembled all over before relaxing. Once the house-elf relaxed, Julia gently settled it back on top of the toy box. Treble the house-elf wrung its hands and stared adoringly and wonderingly at Julia as she walked back to her siblings.

Harry studied the elf, which he by then realised was the child house-elf John had obliquely referenced that morning, while Rupert crawled all over him. Peach fuzz he'd didn't recall seeing on older elves covered Treble's ears and head, and, like all house-elves who had owners, was wearing something other than actual clothes; in Treble's case, a white pillowcase adorned with music symbols.

"Dad found her in the old Lestrange estate," explained Julia in very quiet voice as she watched Elise hand over a pink plastic ball to an extremely nervous Treble and then clap her hands, fully expecting Treble to throw the ball back. "Her mum Tibble was there too, but she died two days after Dad brought them home."

"How do you know Treble is a girl?"

"I asked," said Julia. "And *no*, I don't ever want to know the physical differences between a girl elf and a boy elf…"

They shuddered before sobering.

"So she's alone?" murmured Harry.

"We're all she has," confirmed Julia. "She doesn't know how old she is, but I'm sure she's not old enough to know how to *be* a House-elf. And I think Tibble was sick for a long time - the only thing she was able to teach Treble was a bit of manual cleaning and that she's bound to serve the Lestranges for life."

Harry exhaled slowly as he pried Rupert's grabby arms off his face.

"What did you do with Tibble?"

"We buried her in Auntie Jack's back garden. Uncle Jason made a headstone."

"That was nice of them. So what are you and your family going to do with Treble?"

"We don't know," said Julia. "There's really not much a house-elf can do here except maybe minding my brothers and sisters, and Ellen's really uncomfortable with the idea of keeping an indentured servant."

"I don't suppose freeing her is an option."

"That would *kill* her," said Julia with much feeling.

"Taking her to Hogwarts wouldn't be a good idea either, not so soon after she lost her mum," Harry went on, as he was forcibly reminded of the many weeks before John and Sherlock was able to gain custody of him. It was among the worse periods of his life; after constantly being placed in a different family after a week, sometimes after a day, never knowing where he was going sleep next, while in the meantime, his magic kept doing strange things, Harry actually wished the Dursleys back, if it meant he had a place where he was allowed to *stay* .

Julia wordlessly shook her head as she continued to watch Treble and Elise throw a ball at each other and Martin play with an Iron Man doll on his own, looking sulky.

"I thought about asking Winky, but I always find her getting drunk on butterbeer lately," she said.

"You can get drunk on *butterbeer* ?" said Harry incredulously. His inattention cost him; Rupert's wayward hand knocked his glasses off-kilter.

"It's strong for House-elves, I've been told," said Julia.

"Really," said Harry as he held Rupert tightly so he'd stop trying to wrestle him; Rupert immediately took this as a challenge and started to struggle against Harry's grip. "John asked Dobby this morning, but he said it's the mother elf's duty to raise children. The fathers don't get to see them at all."

Julia let out a loud sigh.

"Just when I think a house-elf's lot can't get worse," she grumbled. "By the way, did you know you can use magic here without getting caught?"

Harry blinked at her, puzzled. Julia sighed again, pulled out her wand and levitated all her siblings, much to their delight.

" *Oh*," said Harry, blinking at the squealing and laughing Martin, Rupert and Elise. "Is this how you amuse them?"

"Sometimes; the other times I use automotive charms to make the toys move so they can amuse themselves."

"Huh…"

Harry joined in after Julia lowered her siblings back to the floor. He turned a penny whistle into a watch that sang the time. Julia made the Iron Man toy tap-dance and then charmed Elise's ragdoll to waltz with it.

"Your charm work really improved," Harry said as Julia made Rupert's Nemo plush doll swim in the air.

"It finally clicked," said Julia, glowing pink but looking very pleased. "I mean, I never had problems doing spells with paper charms, but

wands… in my head, that wasn't the way you do *real* magic. I'm over that now."

Then something about the way Rupert carried himself caught Julia's eye.

"Rupert, go potty," Julia ordered.

"Eeeeeeh… *noooo*… !" protested Rupert, even as he hunched over with his thighs clamped together.

" *Now*," said Julia sternly. "Or I'm going to send Elise first."

Rupert rushed to the toilet, shoving down his trousers and pants on the way, leaving them discarded on the floor.

"Yes, he does that sometimes," said Julia dryly at the snickering Harry.

Julia had to chase Rupert into the living room after he returned from the toilet, because Rupert refused to wear his pants again. Once Julia finished wrestling the clothes back on Rupert, she and Harry checked John, Mr. and Mrs. Lestrade. They found them in the midst of watching the fascinating activity called…

"Tummy time!" said Mrs. Lestrade between giggles, as she watched Isaac and Benedict, who were laid on their bellies on top of a blanket placed on the floor, side-by-side.

Mr. Lestrade laughed hard as Isaac struggled to keep his head up. Benedict just laid there, his left cheek resting on his arms.

"Benedict's not even trying," said John ruefully, "Oh, good move; excellent posture."

Benedict had finally shifted his head to stare straight ahead, but otherwise he did nothing. Isaac was wiggling around a lot, at one point stretching his right arm out like he was reaching for something.

"Isaac's, like, let me show you how it's done, mate," said Mr. Lestrade, grinning.

"And Benedict's like: I need a nap," said John.

"Oh, they made eye contact!" said Mrs. Lestrade.

Benedict had shifted his head to the other side and now was resting his right chin on his arms, looking sleepily at Isaac. Isaac, who was still working mightily to keep his head up, was side-glancing back at him.

"He's going to crack first," said Mrs. Lestrade when Isaac started squawking and bobbing his head.

Soon, Isaac's fussing got louder and more distressed. Mrs. Lestrade lifted Isaac up from the blanket and cuddled him, and John picked up Benedict to cradle him. If Harry didn't know any better, he would've said Benedict looked bored (but then his father was *Sherlock*…)

"Got anything planned for today?" asked Mr. Lestrade.

"No," said John.

"Then can you stop by my in-law's place? Grandpapa Shin wants to talk to you; something about a transfer."

John immediately turned stone-faced and Harry's heart stared thudding rapidly in his chest.

"Of course," said John quietly. "Now about that… did you know Jackie and Robert broke up?"

Mrs. Lestrade was instantly shocked. " *Why?!* " she shouted.

"How much do you know about the current LV situation?" John asked.

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Lestrade demanded. "What does he have anything to do with it? Isn't he *dead* ?"

"In other words, nothing," John muttered. "It's too long, so let me summarize: The Magic world is at the cusp of civil war, news of LV's death is highly exaggerated and he's staging a comeback even as I

speak, Robert is in the centre of the efforts trying to foil LV, and he broke up with Jackie because he needs to concentrate, never mind Jackie is just as involved in the foiling effort, too."

Mrs. Lestrade stamped her foot angrily after absorbing the summary.

" *That's not right!* " she exclaimed. "Oh, this is so ridiculous! I need to talk to Jackie *now* !"

Then she hurried away, taking Isaac with her.

"… That was cruel," Mr. Lestrade declared. "Ellen's not going to let it go and Jackie won't want to talk. The stalemate's going to last for *days* ."

"Better Ellen than me," said John grimly. "I don't have her stamina."

"Please think of me and my poor children."

"You have a squad of in-laws doing it already."

" *Cruel*," said Mr. Lestrade, shaking his head. "So what is this transfer about?"

"How much do *you* know about the current LV situation?"

"Didn't know there was an LV situation until you brought it up. I suppose the drug-smuggling is somehow related?"

"Yep," said John. "I don't know how much I can tell you."

"Well, just so you know, all my estranged wizard family members are fanatical LV supporters," said Mr. Lestrade irritably. "I don't think they'll welcome me and Ellen with hugs and kisses if LV comes back."

"True," John conceded. "Okay, so this is what's going on…"

John explained what Voldemort's new agent had done in regards to the Triwizard Tournament, about Voldemort's soul fragment in Harry's scar and Dr. Robert's promise to take the soul fragment from

Harry. Mr. Lestrade's right eye twitched throughout the explanation.

"Oh, *bloody hell*…" he hissed after John finished talking.

"It's an ugly mess," said John.

"How can you be so calm?!" shouted Mr. Lestrade.

"I'm not calm," said John in a low, dangerous voice. "I'm effing *furious* ."

Mr. Lestrade breathed in deeply as he reared back.

"… Right," he said. "So what are you going to do? Just let the wizards do what they think is best?"

"I don't know," said John honestly. "It's not like I can stop them. And magic has these nuances that make it hard for me to think of alternatives."

"The more powerful the magic, the subtler it is, yeah," said Mr. Lestrade knowingly. "Want me to go with you?"

"If your wife lets you."

"She's already there, probably," said Mr. Lestrade as he got up. "Pack your stuff. Let's go."

While Mr. Lestrade and John prepared to go to Miss Jackie's, Harry and Julia waited in the living room. Harry kept his glance firmly on his knees because he couldn't bring himself to look at Julia. Julia was, in some ways, worse than Hermione when it came to hiding her thoughts. He didn't think he would stand it if Julia thought he was coward and he saw it plain on her face.

"You're so brave," said Julia abruptly.

Harry looked inspite of himself. " *What* ?"

"Anyone can pretend like nothing is wrong, but I think it takes real

courage to admit you're over your head and ask help," said Julia. "That's why I think you're brave."

Harry stared. He didn't know what to say.

He remained speechless until Mr. Lestrade came back, announcing that they were ready to go.

Mr. Lestrade led them to a very plain and innocuous looking two-door wardrobe made of pressure-treated wood. Harry smelled ozone when Mr. Lestrade opened the doors. Mr. Lestrade walked right into the wardrobe and vanished. His children followed his example, none of them looking remotely alarmed or disturbed. After Julia vanished whilst carrying Elise, Harry stepped inside the wardrobe. The smell of ozone was stronger inside and abruptly everything went black. His foot didn't seem to be touching anything, and he felt the sensation of standing on nothing. Then he took another step and suddenly Harry found himself inside another open wardrobe, leading out to the Shin's living room.

Harry quickly stepped out of the wardrobe and looked around. Mr. Lestrade was herding Martin, Rupert and Elise down a hall. Mr. Jason and Dr. Robert were sitting by the low table in the middle of the airy living room, having an animated discussion. Harry had to look away when he saw what Dr. Robert was wearing. His trousers looked as though he foraged a parachute lined with narrow black vertical stripes, cut the fabric with a blunt knife and stitched everything together to make clothes. His bare feet and wrinkled black-on-white chequered shirt, which looked as though it had been washed in seawater and hadn't seen a clothing iron for months, reinforced the impression Dr. Robert was marooned on a deserted island. Once Harry banished the afterimages, he listened to what Dr. Robert and Mr. Jason was talking about.

"Chicken thigh," said Dr. Robert firmly. "It's the best meat. Julia Child is going to back me up on this."

"Most people would pick the breast for health reasons," said Mr. Jason.

"Listen, the only reason why a chicken has breasts is because we

haven't figured out how to make a chicken with four thighs," Dr. Robert argued seriously. "As soon as we *do*, we're going to be onto something."

"He must be really stressed," John remarked as Mr. Jason and Dr. Robert continued their discussion on chicken dinners. "Robert only talks about unhealthy-ish food when he's stressed."

"Why?" asked Harry.

"Well he's the type who stress-eats, but he refuses to actually eat anything unhealthy, so he just talks about it," John explained.

Harry felt a bit weak. Julia sighed deeply and grumbled: "I wish he was easier to like."

Mr. Lestrade returned to the living room. He, Mr. Jason and Dr. Robert stood deferentially in attention when Grandmaster Shin entered the living room from the back garden. Mr. Shin nodded at his son and son-in-law. Then, after telling Dr. Robert to his face that he must either possess an extremely aggressive form of Stupid or had mastered Bonehead Logic - a mindset that made perfect sense once you eliminated the fear of pain, suffering and death, apparently - he started to address the soul fragment transfer.

"It cannot be done now," said Mr. Shin. "Normally the new human vessel has less magic than the old human vessel, so the magic in the soul fragment flows naturally to the new vessel. This is likely not the case for Dr. Ju and Harry, seeing as Dr. Ju has the equivalent of eighty years of cultivated magic."

"So we have to wait until Harry has more cultivated magic than Robert?" asked John.

"Well, I can gi-" Dr. Robert started.

" *No*," said Mr. Shin loudly. "Magic is not mindless. Wands may have less magic than humans, but they can still refuse to cooperate. Once Harry is able to control his magic without a wand - meaning he is able to sense it's presence inside his body and know how to move it consciously - then he will be able to cooperate with me when I

perform the transfer."

Harry felt an odd sense of relief after he heard that. It was strange to feel that way.

"Will this delay work against your foolish vow, Doctor?" asked Mr. Shin.

"Uh, no," said Dr. Robert, scratching his neck. "I vowed that I would remove the soul fragment in Harry either by taking the soul fragment myself or help him destroy it through other means. Whichever becomes viable first. I didn't put any time restraints."

Harry felt another bout of relief. If Miss Jackie developed the spell first, then Dr. Robert wouldn't have to shoulder the burden at all. He quickly prayed that that would be the case.

"You are not as foolhardy as I feared," said Mr. Shin sardonically. "So it is settled. Jacqueline and I will continue to research *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* . Harry, in the meantime, must learn basic Tao-ga. Only you can teach him that, Doctor. I hope you have a way that doesn't involve traditional methods."

"Hailey would murder me if I locked him in a six-by-six-by-six cage and abandoned him in the Forbidden Forest," muttered Dr. Robert. "I'll think of something."

"I have a question," said Mr. Jason, raising his hand. "Why do you have to transfer the soul fragment to a *human* vessel? Wouldn't it be better to transfer it to a rat or something?"

"You can't," said Dr. Robert flatly.

"To transfer a soul fragment, one must also transfer *life*," Mr. Shin explained. "Life can only be given and taken between same kinds. The life of a rat is not the same as the life of a human. Therefore it cannot be done."

"Oh," said Mr. Jason, looking dazed.

"Wait, Auntie Jack said life is in the *blood*," said Julia. "Does that mean Harry has to give his blood to-"

"Yes," said Dr. Robert. "Ancient wizards knew transferring a soul fragment was risky and dangerous, but they didn't know *why* . Now we do: it was the blood type incompatibility."

"So what if you and Harry have different blood types?" asked Julia, looking very worried.

"Well, my blood type is AB+, so that makes me a universal recipient," said Dr. Robert. "But you're right. It's still risky. There's a reason why we don't do full blood transfusions anymore, and the transfer calls for that."

"There are potions that can overcome this problem," said Mr. Shin. "Don't worry about these details, Doctor. Just focus on the training."

Mr. Shin and Dr. Robert further discussed the training and the *bu-dong* spell. Mr. Shin said the last person who was able to performed it was an old acquaintance of his, simply known as Master Lee. Master Lee, according to Mr. Shin, lived and breathed Bonehead Logic, which was probably why he tried the *bu-dong* spell in the first place.

"Jacqueline is studying the circumstances under which he performed the spell," said Mr. Shin. "You should hear it from her."

Dr. Robert's expression became fixed. "Uh…" he stuttered.

Mr. Shin didn't stay to listen; he walked away.

"Does he *not* know Jack and Robert are…" whispered John, waving a hand at Mr. Shin's retreating back.

Mr. Jason shook his head tiredly. "I don't think so."

"You guys didn't tell him?"

"We've been *trying*," said Mr. Jason exasperatedly. "But it doesn't *click* . I even flat-out told him Jack and Robert are together. This was his reaction."

Mr. Jason put on a stony expression that made him look exactly like Mr. Shin without wrinkles. Then he started to laugh in way that sent

chills down Harry's spine.

"He thought I was *joking*," Mr. Jason complained after he finished his terrifying demonstration. "And I can't say I blame him, not when Jackie always acts like *that* when Dad and Robert are in the same room."

He pointed. Harry, John, Julia and Mr. Lestrade turned to look. Miss Jackie was entering the living room, Mr. Shin and Mrs. Lestrade right behind her. Mrs. Lestrade did a full body twitch when she saw Dr. Robert. Miss Jackie, on the other hand, just closed her eyes in pained resignation.

Everyone seemed to hold their breath as they waited for Miss Jackie to further react.

"… Robert," said Miss Jackie eventually. " *What are your trousers* ?"

"I thought you weren't going to talk about them," said Dr. Robert with a ghost of a smile on his face.

"They make you look like an able-bodied seaman from 1873. How can I *not* talk about them?" snapped Miss Jackie.

Dr. Robert's smile only became more pronounced.

"Is that your hat?" said Miss Jackie, pointing at something without looking at it. "It has to be. No one else would wear something so purple."

Harry looked reluctantly. The trilby Miss Jackie was pointing at was indeed purple, and it had a maroon band.

"I think I know what the problem is," said Mr. Lestrade sarcastically.

"Why does he dress like that?" Mr. Jason wondered. "I mean, seriously, *why* ?"

"I have no idea," muttered John. "It's like an actual disability. And it's getting worse every year."

Miss Jackie eventually told everyone (minus Mrs. Lestrade, who'd rather look after her children then suffer the sight of Dr. Robert) the circumstances under which Master Lee used the *bu-dong* spell.

"The first time he'd used it was also the first time it was successfully cast in many decades," said Miss Jackie as she read the notes on her lap. "He came across a religious cult secretly led by an unscrupulous dark wizard who called himself Enkidu, and when he infiltrated the base, he encountered a heavy illusion-"

"What's a heavy illusion?" asked Julia.

"It's an illusion in the sense that it doesn't affect the material world. But it *can* wreak havoc in a person's mind and thus drive the person insane," said Miss Jackie. "Anyway, he got caught in one. Tao-ga was the only type of magic he knew, so it makes sense he would use a Tao-ga spell. But all records say he wasn't at all skilled at Tao-ga. Master Lee himself admits he has very little talent in magic."

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Lestrade. "You mean he invaded the base *knowing* he wasn't equipped to handle the situation?"

"Well it says here strategy and intelligence weren't his strongest skills…"

" **Stupid** . You mean he was **STUPID**," interrupted Mr. Shin.

Miss Jackie winced. "Well the, um, victims Enkidu captured for human sacrifice testifies Master Lee was suddenly enveloped in a blinding, gold light. The heavy illusion, which took the form of a giant serpent made of blue-green flames, vanished when the light faded. Master Lee says he thought about *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* when he saw the snake. Master Lee was able to repeat the feat after this, but not very often because *bu-dong-myung-an-shim-gyul* required a lot of magic and its effectiveness was hit-or-miss. For example, it did nothing when he was under the Cruciatus Curse, though the light bought him enough time to physically clobber the witch who cast it on him."

They fell into a thoughtful silence. John, who was sitting next to Miss Jackie, unexpectedly broke it:

"He looks like my dad's friend Mr. Lee," said John, pointing at the notes.

Mr. Shin looked at John sharply. "Tell me more," he demanded.

"He and his wife were our neighbours," said John, looking a bit surprised. "My dad and Mr. Lee played rugby at the local club, and Mrs. Lee visited us weekly with food baskets. They were there at the hospital when me and my sister was born. I don't think my dad would've coped without them when my mother died."

Mr. Shin nodded slowly, his dark eyes glinting.

" *Interesting*," he muttered.

Harry was unable to follow the discussion that happened afterwards because the words Mr. Shin and Miss Jackie were using flew right over his head. Mercifully, he didn't have to stay for all of it, because John said they'd better go because Benedict's nap time was at hand.

"Can we buy one of these enchanted wardrobes?" John asked as she bundled Benedict into his sling.

"I made it," said Dr. Robert. "I could-"

" *No*," said Mr. Shin firmly. "It's against our laws to put such a powerful enchanted device in a primarily muggle household."

"Shame," said John regretfully.

The first thing Harry did when he returned to Hogwarts later that afternoon was rounding up Julia, Ron, Hermione, Neville and Ginny and tell them everything he'd learned over the weekend. Ron looked like his head was about to explode when Harry finished talking.

"We always knew Sherlock was brilliant, but this is especially clever," said Hermione admiringly. "It makes perfect sense; even if the agent is under disguise, his real name won't change."

"So how should we do this?" Harry said.

"Well finding the names of the people involved in the task is easy enough. We just have to introduce ourselves, and then ask for their names," said Hermione matter-of-factly. "I expect there's going to be a lot of names to remember, so I think either me or Julia should keep an eye on the maps."

"We better use the Marauder's map," said Julia thoughtfully. "The 3D map is too flashy and obvious."

"True," said Hermione. "But once you're inside the editor's booth, you can use the 3D map."

They quickly decided each person's roles after this. Ron would contact Bagman and Crouch, suggesting that they introduce themselves to everyone involved in the first task before it happened to prevent any confusion when they filmed it. Hermione would note the (ministry) worker's name as they did, Harry would 'film' the task as expected, and in meantime everyone would monitor the map.

"So this training you have to do, when will it happen?" asked Hermione, looking rather envious.

"I don't know," said Harry. "Dr. Robert has to come up with a training plan that doesn't involve abandoning me in the Forbidden Forest. Who knows when that will happen?"

Hermione, Ron, Ginny and Neville looked highly disturbed.

"What kind of magic requires you to *abandon people in the Forbidden Forest* in order to learn it?!" Ron asked incredulously.

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

Time acted in the most peculiar fashion after that brief meeting. There were moments when Harry swore the clock wasn't moving at all. Everyone who wasn't a champion said they couldn't wait to see the first task, but Harry, who had far more than entertainment at stake, swore he'd lose his head if time moved any slower. His impatience frayed his attention so much, he kept accidentally summoning heavier and harder things than the cushion he was

suppose focus on at Charms - Professor Flitwick, for example.

Percy Weasley sent an Owl on Monday at around lunch. His note said to meet him at the grounds so he could escort them to where the first task would take place. He also complimented Ron for alerting Mr. Crouch as he should have. Ron looked torn between revulsion and shock when he read that.

Harry was awake for most of the night. As he lay on his four-poster, he kept wondering who the agent may be. Could he be one of the dragon keepers? Bagman? Crouch? He could literally be *anyone* if he used the Polyjuice potion…

Harry didn't know when he fell asleep, but he woke up Tuesday morning when Ron threw a pillow at him.

"Oi, time to go!" Ron shouted.

Harry readjusted his glasses, which were still on his face.

"Yeah," he said grimly.

Final Notes : Another update that took me two weeks. I apologize for the longer wait periods. I just can't write fast when a chapter isn't funny (In fact I was able to write everything in two days once it became funny)… Anyway, here it is. And there is still so much left to cover. Why so long, GOF, *why*…

If you want to know how Mr. Shin laughs, just look up a video where Agent Smith from Matrix trilogy is laughing. Robert is quoting Alton Brown when he talks about chicken thighs.

House-elf breeding practices are based on the W.O.M.B.A.T. test. Apparently house-elves have an average life expectancy of 200 years, cannot be ordered to kill themselves, breed infrequently and only with their master's permission. The plot idea that came out of the factoid was quite… unsettling.

The first task is next. Perhaps I'll even get to cover the *Yule Ball.* Bahahaha… at last… !

The First Filming

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Seven: The First Filming

Hermione felt like a solider about to face her first battle without the benefit of a General when she joined Harry, Ron, Ginny and Neville at the Gryffindor common room. Her anxiety mushroomed after they went down to the Great Hall for breakfast, because it became very clear the boys' plan for the task filming merely encompassed: 1) meet Percy, 2) go to dragon enclosure and 3) film task and check map.

"Ron, you have to introduce us to *everyone* from the ministry so we can get their names," Hermione hissed. "And I do mean *everyone* ."

"I know. Don't nag," Ron snapped whilst munching on his bacon.

"Do you know when Percy's going to be here?" Hermione asked again.

"Uh…"

"Call him now."

" *Fine*," Ron grumbled, digging into his pocket.

"Harry, do you have the map?" Hermione asked, turning her

attention to him.

Harry, much to Hermione's relief, wordlessly pulled out a folded piece of old parchment from his messenger bag and handed it over.

"What about your camera equipment?" Hermione asked as she tucked the map in her notebook.

Harry's jaw dropped slightly. "I don't know, I forgot."

The relief Hermione felt earlier vanished.

"You need them right now! We won't have the time to go and fetch them after morning classes!"

"I'll check the Music Room," Harry promised.

"You better," said Hermione furiously.

Julia joined them at the Gryffindor table. Besides her usual tote, Julia was carrying a small padded bag, which she gave to Harry.

"What's this?" Harry asked.

"The cameras," said Julia, gifting Hermione a bout of gratifying relief. "Keep the cameras in it when you're not using them. Oh, and you'll need your broom for the aerial shots."

The look on Harry's face made it obvious it hadn't occurred to him to think about aerial shots.

"Oh. Right," he muttered.

They went to their morning classes afterwards. Lessons were to stop at midday, giving all the students time to get down to the dragons' enclosure-though of course, they didn't yet know what they would find there. In fact, the members of the OBH were likely the only students who knew what to expect.

Hermione, Harry, Ron and Neville talked how one could face a dragon alone armed with only his/her wand as they sat through History of Magic as soon as their fellow Gryffindors were soundly

asleep.

"I have no idea how the champions are going to tackle them; their hides are supposed to be imbued with ancient magic so spells can't penetrate…"

"Yeah, you should've seen how many people it took to just stun them. So that rules out the Stunning Spell…"

"Well, there are Switching Spells… but what's the point of switching it? Unless you swapped its fangs for wine gums or something that would make it less dangerous… The trouble is, like you said, not much is going to get through a dragon's hide… I'd say Transfigure it, but something that big, you really haven't got a hope, and I doubt even Professor McGonagall… unless you're supposed to put the spell on *yourself* ? Maybe to give yourself extra powers? But they're not simple spells, I mean, we haven't done any of those in class, I only know about them because I've been doing O.W.L. practice papers…"

The six of them had a hasty lunch of sandwiches after their second morning classes. They then left the Great Hall to meet Percy. On their way across the Entrance Hall, Hermione reminded Harry that he still hadn't fetched his broom.

"Are you *not* doing aerial shots?" asked Hermione.

"Oh, I will," said Harry.

"But we haven't the time to…"

Harry lifted his wand in lieu of answering.

" *Accio Firebolt!* " he cried.

There was a pause. Then they heard something speeding through the air behind them. Hermione turned around and saw a broomstick hurtling toward Harry from the marble stairway, soaring into the entrance hall and stopping dead in midair beside him. Harry put the broom on his shoulder and gave Hermione an ironic look.

" *Cheeky*," Hermione huffed, while her other friends chuckled.

They spotted Percy Weasley at the bottom of the stone steps outside. Percy, who was wearing brand-new robes of navy blue for the occasion, had a smug look that made Ginny mutter (loudly) that he ought to be fined for it.

"I've been promoted," Percy said before anyone asked, and from his tone, he might have been announcing his election as the new Minister of Magic. "I'm now Mr. Crouch's personal assistant. That's how I'm here at all."

"Has he stopped calling you Weatherby?" asked Ron snidely.

Percy shot Ron an ugly look. Then after taking a long, dignified breath, Percy led them towards where the dragons were, around the edge of the forest. Throughout the trek, Percy talked nonstop about his job.

"Mr. Crouch has needed an assistant for long time. Hardly surprising-he's overworked. He's not as young as he was- though still quite brilliant, of course, the mind remains as great as it ever was. But the World Cup was a fiasco for the whole Ministry, and he's been under constant scrutiny since Sirius Black turned himself in… he was above reproach, of course. He even dismissed his house-elf for allowing an intruder inside his home. But, well, as I say, he's getting on, he needs looking after, and I think he's found a definite drop in his home comforts since the elf left. And then we had the tournament to arrange, and the aftermath of the Cup to deal with- that revolting Skeeter woman buzzing around- no, he deserves a break. I'm just glad he knew he had someone he could rely upon."

They walked into the forest. As they approached a thick clump of trees, Harry pointed at the tent screening the enclosure. Its entrance was facing towards them.

"The champions are going to wait inside the tent until the task starts," Percy explained. "You can film them after you meet everyone from the ministry."

"Will we get to see Mr. Crouch?" asked Harry.

"I don't think so," said Percy pompously. "He's very busy. He's one

of the judges, you know."

Harry turned around and shrugged. Hermione sighed through her nose. She supposed it wasn't a disaster; they already knew what Crouch looked like and knew his name, having met him at the World Cup.

They passed by the tent. Over thirty wizards and witches were standing before the enclosure, Bartemius Crouch and Ludo Bagman among them. Crouch looked his usual self, his toothbrush moustache perfectly trimmed, hair parted unnaturally straight and robes immaculate. Bagman looked somehow like a slightly overblown cartoon figure, standing next to the grim and severe Crouch and before the harassed-looking Ministry workers and dragon keepers. He was wearing his old Wasp robes again.

"There they are!" said Bagman happily, waving.

"I hope we aren't late, Mr. Crouch," said Percy breathlessly.

"You are not," said Crouch dryly. "Thank you, Weatherby."

Percy turned pink. Ron clamped his mouth shut in a desperate effort to not snigger. Ginny had to kick him in order to remind him what he was supposed to do.

"… Hello, we're from the OBH," said Ron very seriously after recovering. "I'm Ron Weasley, the assistant director. These are my friends Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Harry Potter…"

As soon as he said Harry's name, the vast majority of ministry workers and dragon keepers squawked and pointed. Then they clamoured around Harry to shake his hand, ignoring everyone else. Ginny and Julia rolled their eyes at this rather typical reaction to meeting *Harry Potter*, and Neville's sympathy to Harry's plight was plain on his open face. The only exception was Ron; Hermione couldn't help but notice he looked very hurt and perhaps even a bit angry.

Then Hermione heard the ministry workers say their names and started jotting them down, trying her best to look like she wasn't.

"Bartholomew Bellentine, Mr. Potter; it's an honour to meet you in person!" said a burly, square-jawed wizard.

"Quintin Switch, Mr. Potter; delighted to see you!" said a tall, sinewy wizard who had a mass of floppy brown hair.

"Alfred Jackson, Mr. Potter! I always wanted to shake your hand!" said dark-skinned wizard with dreadlocks.

This went on for several minutes. Quintin Switch and another witch kept coming back for another handshake. Charlie Weasley gave Ron and Ginny a rueful and slightly embarrassed smile as his colleagues continued to crowd around poor Harry. Soon, Crouch had enough.

"We're pressed on time, gentlemen, and there are charges you need attending to," he barked impatiently. "I also need to explain the rules."

Switch shook Harry's hand one last time before joining his fellow dragon keepers. Hermione felt dismayed as she hastily put her notebook away. She wasn't confident she'd got all the names, let alone remembered all the faces.

"No one is allowed to enter the enclosure or interfere with the task while a champion is within the premises," said Mr. Crouch, speaking as though he was pronouncing a divine fiat. "The only exception is ministry personnel, who will interfere if the champion's life is in danger." Then, curiously, Crouch glanced at Harry. "I was told you are the cameraman, Potter. That puts you rather close to the source of danger."

"I'll keep my distance," said Harry. "I don't think I'll do a lot of close-ups anyway."

"You will use your broom?"

"For the aerial shots," Harry confirmed, miming a flying broom with his hand.

Mr. Crouch raised an eyebrow. "You are planning to take different kinds of 'shots'."

"Yes…?" said Harry, looking curious.

"I recall," Mr. Crouch said, "that the Magical Mobile Network's World Cup broadcast showed images one can only make if the game was recorded at different locations inside the stadium simultaneously. I assume this is what you are going to do."

"Yes."

"How are you going to do this when you alone are the cameraman?" Mr. Crouch asked in conclusion.

Harry multiplied himself into two without missing a beat. Bagman's jaw dropped and Crouch's eyes seemed to bulge out of their sockets.

"… I see," said Mr. Crouch a bit unsteadily, after Harry banished his clones. "Yes, that would work. Your reputation as Hogwarts's best spell-caster is not unfounded." He cleared his throat. "Weatherby, bring the badges."

Percy came forward, solemnly holding up six shiny gold badges hanging on purple lanyards. Each badge had a name engraved on it.

"This is to differentiate you from the other students," Mr. Crouch explained. "Put it on."

Hermione took the badge that had her name on it from Percy and hung it around her neck. The rest of her friends followed suit. Mr. Crouch checked his pocket watch after they were done.

"I need to take my seat at the Judge's panel," he said. "I'll leave the rest to you, Ludo."

"Leave it me, Barty!" said Bagman cheerfully. "I'll be explaining the task procedures to the champions," he said as Mr. Crouch walked away, Percy following him like a devoted terrier, "You should come along! Your customers might want to see the champions' reactions…"

"You lot can go," said Harry, looking at them meaningfully. "Get the

really good seats…"

"Yes, of course," said Hermione quickly as she pushed Ron and Neville's backs so they would start moving. "See you later, Harry!"

Harry nodded once, and then followed after Bagman into the tent, taking the camera out as he walked.

"I'm not sure if I got all the names," said Hermione anxiously as they hurried over to the empty audience stands. "I wrote as quickly as I could, but they were crowding around Harry like so many bees, I…"

Julia raised a very familiar-looking smartphone.

"Never rely on your own memory if you can take a video," she said.

" *Brilliant!* " Hermione breathed. "Oh, this is wonderful! We can reference both the name and face with that!"

"Let's check the map now," said Ginny as they picked up the pace. "Once everyone gets here, there'll be too many names to track."

"You're right," Hermione agreed. "Okay, let's take a look…"

Harry looked around as soon as he entered the tent. All three champions were inside already. Fleur Delacour was sitting in a corner on a low wooden stool. She didn't look nearly as composed as usual, but rather pale and clammy. Viktor Krum looked even surlier than usual, which Harry supposed was his way of showing nerves. Cedric was pacing up and down. When Harry entered, Cedric gave him a small smile, which Harry returned.

"All right, lady and gentlemen-time to fill you in!" said Bagman brightly. "When the audience has assembled, I'm going to offer each of you this bag"-he held up a small sack of purple silk and shook it at them- "from which you will each select a small model of the thing you are about to face! There are different - *er* - varieties, you see. And I have to tell you something else too… ah yes… your task is to *collect the golden egg* !"

Harry glanced around. Cedric had nodded once, to show that he understood Bagman's words, and then started pacing around the tent again; he looked slightly green. Fleur Delacour and Krum hadn't reacted at all. Perhaps they thought they might be sick if they opened their mouths. Harry would have felt like that if he were in their shoes…

They waited. In no time at all, hundreds upon hundreds of pairs of feet could be heard passing the tent, their owners talking excitedly, laughing, and joking. Harry hovered awkwardly, alternating between directing the camera to the interior of the tent and the goings outside of it. He also wondered if Hermione and the others had found the agent.

Once the audience stand was full, Bagman opened the neck of the purple silk sack.

"Ladies first," he said, offering it to Fleur Delacour.

She put a shaking hand inside the bag and drew out a tiny, perfect model of a dragon - a scarlet Chinese Fireball. It had the number two around its neck. Harry knew, by the fact that Fleur showed no sign of surprise, but rather a determined resignation, that he had been right: Madame Maxime had told her what was coming.

The same held true for Krum. He pulled out the Hungarian Horntail. It had a number three around its neck. Krum didn't even blink as the miniature model stretched its wings and bared its minuscule fangs; he just sat back down and stared at the ground.

Cedric was last. He put his hand into the bag, and out came the blueish-grey Swedish Short-Snout, the number one tied around its neck.

"Well, there you are!" said Bagman. "You have each pulled out the dragon you will face, and the numbers refer to the order in which you are to take on the dragons, do you see? Now, I'm going to have to leave you in a moment, because I'm commentating. Mr. Diggory, you're first, just go out into the enclosure when you hear a whistle. Now Harry, could I have a quick word? Outside?"

"Er… yes," said Harry blankly, and went out of the tent with Bagman, who walked him a short distance away, into the trees, and then turned to him with a fatherly expression on his face.

"So how is the company doing?"

"Good, I guess," said Harry. "Why do you-"

"A lot of new customers?" said Bagman, lowering his voice conspiratorially. "This broadcasting thing is really brilliant, you know, and I don't mind helping you out. I mean," Bagman continued, lowering his voice still further, "I heard you're interested in broadcasting local Quidditch matches. If you need my word of reference…"

"No," said Harry so quickly he knew he had sounded rude, "I mean, no, this isn't something I can decide…"

"But it's a wonderful idea, Harry," said Bagman, winking at him. "It'll bring a lot of profits…"

"No, really," said Harry, wondering why Bagman was pushing the idea, and wondering why he was talking to him about it. "I'm just the cameraman. If you want to talk about this, you should talk to Ron…"

A whistle had blown somewhere.

"Good lord, I've got to run!" said Bagman in alarm, and he hurried off.

Harry returned to the tent just in time to see Cedric emerging from it, greener than ever.

"Good Luck," said Harry.

Cedric opened his mouth, but all that came out of it was a sort of hoarse grunt. Harry felt a deep sense of pity as he watched Cedric walk past on shaking legs. Deciding he should split his attention between the waiting champions, and the dragon enclosure at both ground and air level, Harry duplicated himself into three, sent one clone back to the tent, and joined Cedric's trek through the trees, into the enclosure.

It felt as though he'd entered into a highly coloured dream. There were hundreds and hundreds of faces staring down from stands that had been magicked there since he'd last stood on this spot. And there was the Swedish Short-Snout, at the other end of the enclosure, crouched low over her clutch of eggs, her wings half-furled, her evil, yellow eyes upon Cedric, a horned, scaly, silvery-blue monster, and already letting out sparks of blue flame from its mouth. The crowd was making a great deal of noise and Harry's ears were ringing.

The roar went even further up in volume when Cedric started to move towards the dragon, clutching his wand with bloodless fingers.

Harry watched him go as he sent his other clone to run around the enclosure. Then he swung his leg over his broom and kicked off from the ground.

This wasn't possible.

Hermione studied the Marauder's map again, checking every name next to the dots clustered sparsely around the enclosure and periodically looking up to see the terrifying sight of Diggory trying to distract the Swedish Short-Snout with the Labrador he transfigured out from a rock. There was Switch, Jackson, Bellentine…

No. No, matter how many times she checked, all of the names and faces were correct. *How* ?

Hermione brought her MMN phone to her ear.

"Do you see anything?" she asked frantically.

" *Nothing*," said Julia's voice furiously. "I even looked at the judge's seat, and all the names check out."

Hermione swallowed. What did this mean? Did the maps not work? Was the agent not here? Was Sherlock *wrong* ?

Ron, who had ceased to pay attention to the map the moment he saw the dragon, was staring opened-mouthed at the unfolding task.

"Diggory almost got his head set on fire," he said. "Look-he was really close, too. *Ouch* !"

Someone had poked Ron in the back of the head. It was Malfoy.

"Oh, sorry, Weasley, didn't see you there."

Malfoy grinned broadly at Crabbe and Goyle.

"I told you he wouldn't have anything to do. Potter wouldn't let Weasley or Longbottom to anything dangerous or difficult."

Ron didn't answer; the Short-Snout had let out a long jet of blue fire and the Harry on the broom narrowly dodged it, drawing a loud gasp from the crowd.

"You know how I think how Potter choses his friends?" said Malfoy loudly a few seconds later. "It's always people you feel sorry for. See, there's the Weasleys, who've got no money, the Mudbloods, like Granger here- and of course there's Longbottom; he's got no brains."

Ron jumped to his feet. Neville went bright red as he turned to face Malfoy.

"I'd rather be someone Harry feels sorry for than someone who you'd admire, Malfoy," Neville snapped.

"You tell him, Neville," said Ron.

Malfoy let out a derisive laugh.

"Well I suppose being Saint Potter's lackey is better than being *nobody*," he drawled. "Because really, what else have you got? No magic talent, no wizard family worth mentioning… you two are just tagalongs, leeching off the aftermath of Potter's glory…"

Ron's eye flashed. He reached for his wand.

" *Ron* !" Hermione said warningly.

"Go on, then, Weasley," Malfoy said quietly, drawing out his own

wand. "None of the teachers are here to look-do it, if you've got the guts-"

For a split second, they looked into each other's eyes, then, at exactly the same time, both acted.

" *Furnunculus* !" Ron yelled.

" *Densaugeo* !" screamed Malfoy.

Jets of light shot from both wands, hit each other in midair, and ricocheted off at angles- Ron's hit Goyle in the face, and Malfoy's hit Hermione square in face, blinding her.

Hermione heard Goyle bellow as she clutched her mouth, whimpering, as her two front teeth - always larger than average - sent shooting pains into the centre of her skull as she felt them lengthen at a rapid rate.

" *Hermione* !"

Ron had hurried forward to see what was wrong with her; Ginny swiftly took his place, blasting Malfoy with her Bat-bogey hex and Crabbe the Leg-locker curse. Hermione fought against Ron's effort to drag her hands away from her face. She didn't know how long her front teeth had got, but she could feel something touching her chin, and that couldn't make a pretty sight.

"You'll pay for this, Malfoy!" Ron roared, doubling back after staring at Hermione's face in horror for a second. "C'mon, let's go," he told Hermione. "There's probably a healing tent somewhere near by…"

Hermione grabbed the Marauder's map and let Ron lead the way.

Harry let his camera hang on his neck by its strap after Fleur Delacour retrieved her golden egg. He then removed his ministry-issued nametag with much irritation. The badge flapped over his face every time he made his broom serve or turn, blocking both his view and that of the camera. Having no better idea and pressed on time, Harry stuffed the badge into his camera bag, closed the cover

and refocused his attention downwards.

"And here comes Mr. Krum!" cried Bagman, as Krum slouched into the enclosure.

The Horntail crouched protectively over her slat grey eggs, swishing her spiked tail, which left deep gouges on the ground. Krum approached her slowly, flat-footed and round-shouldered.

Then Krum cast a spell right in the Horntail's evil yellow eyes.

"Very daring!" Bagman yelled, as the Hungarian Horntail emitted a horrible, roaring shriek, and the crowd drew its collective breath. "That's some nerve he's showing!"

Krum ran towards the eggs as the Horntail trembled in agony, its eyes sealed shut, furling and unfurling her wings, roaring and breathing fire everywhere. Harry grimly thought it was only a matter of time before the Horntail would try to roast either him or the audience.

Harry plummeted just as the Horntail blindly turned towards his direction. He wasn't as lucky this time as he was with the Swedish Short-Snout-he missed the flames, but the tail came whipping up to meet him instead, and as he swerved to the left, one of the long spikes grazed his shoulder, ripping his robes.

He could feel it stinging, he heard the crowd groaning and screaming, for whom Harry didn't know, but the cut didn't seem to be deep. He turned around to the back of the Horntail, just in time to catch the sight of Krum retrieving his golden egg amongst the squashed cement-coloured fellows.

"Yes, he's got the egg!" Bagman screamed over the renewed roar of the crowd. "Mr. Krum is the quickest get his egg! That certainly puts the odds to his favour!"

Harry saw the dragon keepers rushing forward to subdue the Horntail. Unfortunately, the Horntail was in full rampage. She swung her spiked tail indiscriminately and kept breathing jets of fire at the ground, like she knew the threat towards her eggs came from below

and wasn't chancing it.

Harry then saw one of the dragon keepers stumble and fall, and the Horntail dipping her head down towards him.

He dived without thinking. The Horntail opened her mouth; Harry knew what it was going to do and transfigured a hardened earth dome over the fallen dragon keeper, shielding him from the jet of fire that was released a second later. The fire expended harmlessly against the dome and Harry pulled up just in time to avoid another swipe of her tail and a hard crash to the ground.

"Great Scott, he can fly!" yelled Bagman as the crowd shrieked and gasped. "Are you watching this, Mr. Krum?"

Harry zoomed away from the dragon as the dragon keepers finally restrained the Horntail. He smoothly landed before the entrance of the enclosure, where Professor McGonagall and Hagrid were hurrying to meet him.

"Of all the reckless, dangerous things you could've done… !" cried Professor McGonagall as he got off the Firebolt. "Nevertheless, that was excellent bit of transfiguration, Potter." Harry blinked at the, for her, extravagant praise. He also noticed that her hand shook as she pointed at his shoulder. "You'll need to see Madam Pomfrey for that… Over there, she's had to mop up Diggory already…"

"Yeh saved his life, Harry!" said Hagrid hoarsely. "Yeh did! An' agains' the Horntail an' all, an' yeh know Charlie said that was the wors'-"

"Yes, I'm quite sure he did, Hagrid. Potter, the first aid tent, please…" said Professor McGonagall.

Harry walked out of the enclosure, still panting, and saw Madam Pomfrey standing at the mouth of a second tent, looking worried.

" *Dragons* !" she said in a disgusted tone, pulling Harry inside. The tent was divided into cubicles; he could make out Cedric's shadow through the canvas, but Cedric didn't seem to be badly injured; he was sitting up, at least. Madam Pomfrey examined Harry's shoulder,

talking furiously all the while. "Last year dementors, this year dragons, what are they going to bring into this school next? You're very lucky. This is quite shallow. It'll need cleaning before I heal it up, though…"

She cleaned the cut with a dab of some purple liquid that smoked and stung, but then poked his shoulder with her wand, and he felt it heal instantly.

"Now, just sit quietly for a minute- *sit* ! There's nothing more for you to do now, is there?"

"I still have to film Krum's scoring," Harry protested.

"You still have your clone running about, don't you?" said Madam Pomfrey. She then bustled out and he heard her go next door and say, "How does it feel now, Miss Granger?"

Alarmed, Harry jumped to his feet and ran into the screened area next door, just as Madam Pomfrey left it to check on Cedric.

Hermione was sitting on a camp bed, looking at a small mirror and examining her teeth. Ron was fuming next to her with his arms crossed. Julia, Neville and Ginny were crowding the small space, looking anxious and worried.

"What happened?" Harry asked urgently.

" *Malfoy*," Ron spat, with so much venom it caught Harry by surprise. "He cursed Hermione at the audience stands."

"Oh," said Harry, blinking. "You okay, Hermione?"

"I am now," said Hermione, covering her mouth as she turned around. "Madam Pomfrey shrunk my teeth back to normal…"

Harry winced at the implications. "Good. Now what about the agent? Did you find him?"

The silence that followed was very telling.

"You didn't," said Harry flatly.

"Everyone's name checked out," said Hermione squeakily. "I checked three times and the results were the same."

Harry felt doubt and panic boil up like smog in his head.

"The agent didn't *have* to come for this task," said Julia reasonably. "He might have decided to lay low for now, wait until we aren't as alert to suspicious activities… maybe even wait until the last task…"

The fog of doubt subsided a little.

"Yeah…" muttered Harry, his heart thudding loudly to his ears. "Yeah, you're right…"

Harry left afterwards to 'film' the Champions, per Hermione and Julia's insistence. Fleur, Cedric, and Krum were all leaving the healer's tent together by that time, apparently to receive instructions for the second task. One side of Cedric's face was covered in a thick orange paste, which was presumably mending his burn.

"Good one," said Harry, smiling at Cedric.

"Thanks," said Cedric, grinning back.

"Well done, all of you!" said Ludo Bagman, bouncing into the first tent a few moments after Harry and the three Champions arrived there. "Now, just a quick few words: You've got a nice long break before the second task, which will take place at half past nine on the morning of February the twenty-fourth- but we're giving you something to think about in the meantime! If you look down at those golden eggs you're all holding, you will see that they open… see the hinges there? You need to solve the clue inside the egg- because it will tell you what the second task is, and enable you to prepare for it! All clear? Sure? Well, off you go, then!"

Harry left the tent, rejoined his friends and they set off back toward the school. Percy and Charlie hurried over to meet them on their way.

"That was unbelievable bit of flying!" said Charlie Weasley. "I've *never* seen anyone fly like that, and I've seen Jason Shin at his worst. Now, listen, I've got to go and call Mum, I swore I'd tell her

what happened- oh yeah, and Percy wants your badges."

"Mr. Crouch's orders," said Percy gruffly. "And I must say, you came very close to being charged for task interference, Harry…"

"Oh, shut up," Ginny snapped. "You try and stand perfectly still when a dragon is breathing fire at you…"

Hermione, Ron, Ginny and Neville handed back their badges to Percy. Harry dug into his camera bag, but found it empty.

"It must've fallen out when you dived," said Ginny sensibly.

Harry felt a bit uneasy at the explanation. He remembered closing the Velcro cover firmly shut after stuffing the badge inside the bag. But the possibility he didn't shut it properly wasn't zero, so Harry dismissed the feeling.

They started to walk back around the edge of the forest, talking hard; Hermione told Harry how Ginny put the leg-locker curse on Crabbe and demolished Malfoy with her Bat-Bogey hex, and Harry told them about Bagman's strange behaviour just before the first task had started, how he tried to circumnavigate Ron to push the idea of filming local Quidditch matches, despite Harry's insistence he was only a cameraman. That seemed to drain the strange air of silent resentment around Ron somewhat.

As they rounded the clump of trees behind which Harry had first heard the dragons roar, a witch leapt out from behind them.

Harry blinked at the strange witch standing right in front of them, blocking their path. Her hair was set in elaborate and curiously rigid curls that contrasted oddly with her heavy-jawed face. She wore jeweled spectacles. The thick fingers clutching her crocodile-skin handbag ended in two-inch nails, painted crimson.

"Hello, Harry," said the woman, her eyes on Harry. "I'm Rita Skeeter."

Final Notes : Details, details, details… I had to iron out a lot of

details before writing this chapter. The boys are lucky the girls are there to cover up their stoopid-ness (I once read a comment that Hermione often acts like Ron and Harry's single mother; I thought it was spot-on).

I'm dividing my attention between two writing projects (an original story and ASIM) at the moment, which, sadly, is affecting my ability to update ASIM as frequently as I used to. I'm still working out the balance.

Yule Ball is next. I think.

Unforeseen Tasks

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Eight: Unforeseen Tasks

Harry blinked at Rita Skeeter, who was beaming at him. Her gold teeth glinted.

"You're the *Daily Prophet* reporter Percy mentioned," said Ron, frowning.

"Oh, excellent, you know me. We don't need introductions, then," said Rita Skeeter, her eyes on Harry. "I wondered if I could have a quick word with you, Harry. Just a short interview, it's nothing serious. You will, won't you?"

"Errr…" Harry stuttered. Something about this situation was ringing alarm bells in his head. He also remembered there was something he was supposed to do if/when a reporter requested an interview, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember *what* exactly John and Sherlock told him to do.

"Lovely," said Rita swiftly. "Now why don't we go somewhere where we can have a bit of privacy?"

In a second, Rita's scarlet-taloned fingers had Harry's upper arm in a surprisingly strong grip, and she was dragging him back into the

Forbidden Forest.

"Excuse me!" said Ginny indignantly. "But I don't remember Harry agreeing to being interviewed!"

Rita acted as though she hadn't heard what Ginny had said.

"The enclosure should be empty by now," said Rita, quickening her pace, "Unless, of course, you want to do it elsewhere?"

"But I don't…" Harry started to protest.

"The Champion tent was rather cosy, wasn't it?" Rita went on. "I think that would do just nicely…"

"Are you listening to me?" said Harry, irritation rising. "I said I don't-"

"Oh, come along, dear," chided Rita Skeeter, as though Harry was acting stupid. "There's nothing at all to worry about. It's just a short interview."

Harry was about to retort, when his friends caught up with them.

" *I know you!* " Julia shouted. "You're the reporter who tried to force Auntie Jack into being interviewed!"

Harry instantly remembered. He quickly checked the hand grasping his arm and confirmed it was about the shape and size of the gigantic bruise Miss Jackie sported on her forearm last year, when a *Daily Prophet* reporter ambushed and then physically dragged her to the Three Broomsticks for an interview.

" *Relashio!* " Harry roared, pointing his wand at Rita's hand.

Immediately Rita's thick digits released its grip on Harry. Harry quickly backed away and rejoined his friends as Rita massaged her hand.

"Really!" she exclaimed. "There's no need for such violence! Stop being so unreasonable!"

"And dragging me to an interview against my will isn't

unreasonable?" said Harry angrily. "What are you up to?"

Rita looked at Harry in apparent disbelief.

"Don't you want to clarify the misunderstanding regarding your spell-casting ability?" she said. "Your fellow students had a huge fight because it! The wizarding world deserves to know the truth!"

"But *you're* the one who created the misunderstanding!" Hermione cried. " *You* wrote the article that said Diggory once won a duel against Harry! How can you say you just want to clarify when you're the one who created the controversy in the first place?"

"Well how was I supposed to know the Hogwarts Champion exaggerated his abilities, you silly girl?" said Rita, looking annoyed. "That's why I'm following up!"

"Well I don't believe you," snapped Julia. "There's no way you could've got the duel story from Cedric. He wouldn't have mentioned it."

"You interviewed Cedric's *father*, didn't you?" said Harry, as the explanation started to dawn on him. "Mr. Diggory likes to boast how great his son is. He probably told the story of Cedric disarming me to you. He tells that story to everyone."

Indeed, one of the first things Mr. Amos Diggory had said, after noticing Harry whilst holding the portkey that was to take them to the Quidditch World Cup site this past summer, was declaring Cedric had a story he could tell to his grandchildren- *that he beat Harry Potter* . Cedric was quick to correct his father, but Mr. Diggory insisted he was being too modest; surely if one person was able to hold onto their wand to disarm the other while said other couldn't, it didn't take a genius to know who the better wizard was.

"Doesn't it rankle you?" said Rita, smiling and staring beadily at Harry. "That's why I wanted to give you the opportunity to set the story straight. See? It's for *your* benefit."

Then Rita unsnapped her crocodile-skin handbag and took out a long acid-green quill and roll of parchment, which she levitated with

a wave of her wand.

"You won't mind if I use a Quick-Quotes Quill? It leaves me free to talk to you normally."

"A *what* ?" Harry said before he could stop himself.

Rita Skeeter's smile widened. Harry counted three gold teeth. She put the tip of the green quill into her mouth, sucked it for a moment with apparent relish, and then placed it upright on the floating parchment, where it stood balanced on its point, quivering slightly.

"Testing… my name is Rita Skeeter, *Daily Prophet* reporter."

Harry looked down at the parchment. The moment Rita Skeeter spoke, the green quill started to scribble, rapidly writing down the following sentence:

Attractive blonde Rita Skeeter, forty-three, whose savage quill has punctured many inflated reputations…

"… That is NOT a quote," Harry declared.

"Ignore the quill, Harry," said Rita Skeeter firmly as she ripped the top piece of parchment off, crumpled it up, and stuffed it into her handbag. Now she leaned toward Harry and said, "So, Harry, how did you feel about your fellow students' reaction against Cedric Diggory?"

Even though he wasn't speaking, Harry couldn't help but notice the quill was dashing across the parchment, and in its wake he could make out a fresh sentence:

An ugly scar, souvenir of a tragic past, disfigures the otherwise charming face of Harry Potter, whose eyes-

" *No*," said Harry coldly.

Rita raised her eyebrows and the quill paused. "Sorry?"

"No, I'm not interested in giving you an interview," snapped Harry.

"But Harry-"

"I mean it."

"Don't you-"

" *Good Bye*," said Harry savagely.

Then he turned around and walked away.

He didn't stop until he'd reached the stone steps leading into the castle. Ron, Hermione, Neville, Julia and Ginny, who were following right behind him, stopped, too.

"Blimey, that is one pushy cow," muttered Ron. "No wonder the Ministry hates her."

"She's worse than I ever imagined!" said Hermione angrily. "Silly girl, am I?!"

"I hope it doesn't backfire on us," said Julia anxiously. "She might write an article on how rude we are…"

"Harry was the only person she was after and he refused to talk," said Ginny consolingly. "C'mon, the worst she can do is tell the *Daily Prophet* readers Harry told her nothing. I'm sorry, did I say worst? I mean best."

They laughed. Then, feeling much better, they went off to the kitchens for a quick bite.

"Won't the Hufflepuffs want to celebrate, Julia?" asked Ginny. "Cedric did tie with Delacour."

"That would be nice," Julia agreed. "But I feel bad to ask the elves. It'll be a lot of work at a short notice."

"It should be fine," said Ron. "Fred and George've been nicking food from the kitchens for parties for *years* . And the house-elves will hand over a whole roasted ox if you told them you're feeling a bit peckish."

Blippy & Co. were more than happy to provide a veritable mountain of treats, pastries, cakes and drinks on the spot when they asked. Julia disappeared briefly and then returned with her Hufflepuff friends, who helped carry the food over to the Hufflepuff common room.

"How did you manage this?" one of the girls marvelled.

"With the fine art of persuasion," said Ron solemnly before putting on a hopeful grin, "Mind if we join?"

The girls giggled. "Of course not!"

Hermione turned furious when Ron eagerly joined Julia's Hufflepuff girlfriends. Harry stayed inside the kitchen to avoid them, as he had his fill of attention for the day.

"Is there anything else Blippy can do for Harry Potter?" asked Blippy as he tried to push Dobby out of the way.

"I'm fine, thanks," said Harry. Then he looked around, "Where is Winky?"

Blippy looked down at his feet. Dobby similarly drooped.

"Winky is over there by the fire, Harry Potter," said Dobby quietly, pointing at the huge fireplace.

Harry looked to where he was pointing. Winky was sitting on the same stool as last time, but she had allowed herself to become so filthy that she was not immediately distinguishable from the smoke-blackened brick behind her. Her clothes were ragged and unwashed. She was clutching a bottle of butterbeer and swaying slightly on her stool, staring into the fire. As Harry watched her, she gave an enormous hiccup.

"Winky is going through six bottles a day now," said Dobby sadly.

"Is that a lot for a house-elf?" Harry asked.

"Far too much," Dobby said, his bat-like ears drooping. "Winky is pining, Harry Potter. Winky wants to go home. Winky still thinks Mr.

Crouch is her master, sir, and nothing Dobby says will persuade her that Professor Dumbledore is her master now."

"She did serve Crouch for all her life," said Harry, scratching the back of his head.

Then an idea came to him.

"Um, Winky?" Harry started.

Winky looked blearily back at Harry.

"Could you do me a favour?" Harry asked tentatively.

Winky's eyes narrowed.

"What favour you is asking from - *hic* - Winky?" she asked suspiciously.

"Mr. Lestrade has a baby house-elf named Treble," Harry explained. "I wondered if you could teach her how to be a proper house-elf."

Winky looked as far from enthused as one could get.

"Why is you - *hic* - asking *me* ?" she mumbled. "Winky is just a - *hic* - disgraced, failure of an elf."

"Well I don't agree," said Harry. "I think you're the only house-elf who can do it." He paused for a second. "I also thought maybe, if you did a really good job, Mr. Lestrade would vouch for you to Mr. Crouch. They work together at the Ministry, you know."

Winky's watery brown eyes went completely round.

"And maybe-just *maybe* -Mr. Lestrade could persuade Mr. Crouch to take you back in," Harry finished.

Winky got unsteadily to her feet.

" *You is really thinking so* ?" she asked breathlessly. "You is really thinking if Winky can train this baby elf well I can return to my Master?"

"It's possible," said Harry, even as he wondered just how possible it was.

Winky burst into tears.

" *Winky will do it* !" Winky screeched, waving both fists and sloshing butterbeer all over her head and heavily stained blouse as she did so. "Winky will turn Treble into a fine and proper - *hic* - house-elf!"

"Great, thank you," said Harry dubiously. "Now just one word of advice: stop drinking butterbeer."

"Winky *won't* !" said Winky shrilly, still clutching her now empty bottle. "Winky will… *never*… drink… again…"

Winky's eyelids drooped and suddenly, without warning, she toppled backwards into the hearth and snored loudly. The empty bottle of butterbeer rolled away across the stone-flagged floor. Half a dozen house-elves came hurrying forward, looking disgusted. One of them picked up the bottle; the others covered Winky with a large checked tablecloth and tucked the ends in neatly, hiding her from view.

"I is sorry you had to see that!" squeaked one of the elves, shaking his head and looking very ashamed. "Cobby is hoping you will not judge us all by Winky, sir and miss!"

"I don't," said Harry quickly. "And I understand why she's unhappy, really…"

"No, no, Winky has acted most shamefully!" squeaked Cobby, bowing deeply again. "A house-elf has no business feeling unhappy when there is work to be done and masters to serve!"

Harry felt a bit helpless. "Right…"

"No, it's *not* right!" said Hermione hotly, making Harry jump. "Harry, how could you? You're *encouraging* Winky to return to slavery!"

Harry knew his idea was going to backfire on him; he just didn't foresee this.

"I didn't mean her to go back as a *bonded* elf," said Harry warily. "I

don't think it works that way."

"Well, I hope not!" said Hermione, her eyes flashing dangerously. "But, Harry, you're still helping her go back to that horrible Crouch man! How is that right? She should be learning how to *enjoy* her freedom! I mean, look at Dobby! Don't you want Winky to be happy and free like him?!"

"Miss will please keep Dobby out of this," Dobby mumbled, looking scared. The cheery smiles had vanished from the faces of the house-elves around the kitchen.

"Of course I want her be happy," said Harry, feeling more drained by the second. "I just…"

"So why don't you try and cheer her up instead of helping her be a *slave* again?" Hermione cried passionately. Then she turned to the unsmiling elves, "Listen to me, all of you! Winky's got just as much right as wizards to be unhappy, and so do you! There's no reason for you to think you can't be unhappy because wizards ordered to you work! You've got the right to wages and holidays and proper clothes, and you don't have to do everything you're told!"

None of the house-elves spoke for a second. But they were suddenly looking at Hermione as though she were mad and dangerous.

"We has extra food for your party!" squeaked an elf at Harry's elbow, and the elf shoved a several bottles of pumpkin juice, a dozen cakes and some fruit into Hermione's arms. "Good-bye!"

The house-elves crowded around Hermione and began shunting her out of the kitchen, many little hands pushing in the small of her back. Once she was outside, they shut the door behind her.

"Harry Potter has strange friends," said Blippy, shaking his head. "Blippy is thinking Harry Potter is very kind and noble to stay friends with such a strange miss."

Harry refused to consider the implications of that statement.

"She isn't… it's complicated," Harry mumbled, covering his eyes as

he felt a headache building, "Dobby?"

"Yes, Harry Potter?" Dobby replied miserably from the hearth, where he was standing next to the lumpy tablecloth that was Winky.

"Could you be there when Winky is teaching Treble? I have a feeling she's going to need help."

Dobby bowed deeply.

"Oh, yes, Harry Potter, sir, Dobby will help Winky teach baby house-elf Treble!"

Harry thanked Dobby and left the kitchen. Outside in the hallway he encountered Ernie Macmillan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbott and Susan Bones.

"There you are!" said Justin brightly. "The party already started! You should be there!"

"I'm a bit tired," Harry protested weakly as Hannah and Susan started pushing him down the corridor.

"Stop being such an anti-social hermit," chided Susan. "Come on, join us…"

Ernie took lead. He walked into a nook on the right-hand side of the kitchen corridor, and then stopped in front of a stack of large barrels. Instead of a password, Ernie tapped the second barrel from the bottom, middle of the second row, in a particular rhythm. Once he finished tapping, the lid of the barrel swung open, exposing a passageway. Ernie crawled into it and Justin followed after him. Feeling curious now, Harry ducked inside the open barrel.

He didn't have to crawl for long. At the end of the passageway was a wide, round, earthy and low-ceilinged room that looked very welcoming, warm and sunny. There were lots of yellow hangings, overstuffed sofas and armchairs upholstered in yellow and black, and circular windows that provided a vista of rippling grass and dandelions. There were a lot of burnished copper lamps about the place, and many plants, which either hung from the ceiling or sat on the windowsills. In the centre of the room was what looked like the

entire house of Hufflepuff; Cedric was in the middle of the crowd, still being congratulated and cheered for.

"No, it's fine," said Harry quickly before Justin could announce their arrival. About a stone throw away, Ginny was imitating Fleur Delacour. Julia and her Hufflepuff girlfriends were laughing fit to burst as Ginny hopped about, waving an invisible wand frantically at an invisible skirt, and Hermione looked amused in spite of herself. Harry didn't want to interrupt them, and he figured Ginny would freeze if she noticed he was there.

So Harry quietly slipped into the crowd and helped himself to food. It was rather nice to go unnoticed.

"Blimey, this is heavy," said one of the sixth year boys, picking up the golden egg that was sitting on a table, and weighing it in his hands. "Open it, Ced! Let's see what's inside it!"

"I'm supposed to figure it out on my own," Cedric protested.

"You're not supposed to receive help from *teachers*," the sixth year corrected. "The tournament rules say nothing about receiving help from *students* ."

"Yeah, go on, open it!" several people echoed.

The sixth year boy passed Cedric the egg. After a moment's hesitation, Cedric dug his fingernails into the groove that ran all the way around it and prised it open.

The egg was hollow and completely empty- but the moment it opened, the most horrible noise, a loud and screechy wailing, filled the room. Harry never heard anything like it outside a horror/slasher film.

" *Shut it* !" one of the older boys bellowed, his hands over his ears.

"What was that?" said a different sixth year, staring at the egg as Cedric slammed it shut again. "Sounded like a banshee… Maybe you've got to get past one of those next!"

"It was someone being tortured!" said Neville, who had gone very

white and spilled sausage rolls all over the floor. "You're going to have to fight the Cruciatus Curse!"

"Don't be a prat, Neville, that's illegal," said Ron. "They wouldn't use the Cruciatus Curse on the champions."

"Yeah, I actually thought it sounded a bit like Percy singing," said Ginny, before turning a bit pink and asking: "What do you think, Harry?"

Harry felt himself go red as all eyes turned to him. So much for going unnoticed, he thought waspishly, as he fixed his own glance on the egg.

And immediately, almost like habit, his brain started to click through the connections. The egg acted a lot like those arbitrary clues that invariably showed up in fairytales. That brought up the memory of Sherlock talking about magic, back when he was first year, in reference to the magical security around the philosopher's stone…

"Well, the egg is supposed to tell you what the second task is," Harry started. "And when you open it, it tells you *something* . Problem is, what it is saying doesn't make sense."

"We figured that out, thanks," drawled a tall, skinny blond boy with an upturned nose. "You don't need to state the obvious."

"Shut it, Smith, let him finish," said Julia sharply.

"… Magic is like fairytales," Harry continued after a moment. "In fairytales, the hero has to-"

"Fairies don't have tails!" interrupted someone.

"I meant *stories*," said Harry, feeling exasperated. "The Muggle kind for children; like Sleeping Beauty and-"

"Is sleeping significant?" piped a first year girl.

" *Never mind!* " said Harry loudly, "My point is: the screeching doesn't make sense because we haven't put the egg in the right condition!"

Hermione clapped her forehead, "Of course! That makes perfect sense!"

"No, it doesn't," muttered Smith.

"Right now it's surrounded by air," said Harry, ignoring Smith. "You can change that by sticking in fire or-"

"-Putting it under water," said Julia, cottoning on. "The first task was arguably about *fire* . So chances are the second task is going to be about *water* . Try putting the egg in water, Cedric!"

A couple of older students quickly brought in a large and deep copper basin. Then all the sixth years filled it with water using the same charm Delacour used to put out the fire on her skirt. Once it was full close to the brim, Cedric lowered the egg into the basin, and pry opened the egg.

Instead of unearthly screeching, a gurgling song came out of it, a song whose words Harry couldn't distinguish through the water.

"I think I'll have to listen underwater," said Cedric, looking amazed. "Hold on…"

He ducked his head into the basin. A few moments later, he drew his head out, dripping and sputtering.

"You were right!" he gasped. "The screeching makes perfect sense underwater!"

"What does it say?" asked Harry eagerly.

"You can hear it, too," said Cedric, smiling.

"You don't mind?"

Cedric made an inviting gesture. Harry came over to the basin, took a great breath and sank his head beneath the water-and he heard a chorus of eerie voices singing to him from the open egg.

" *Come seek us where our voices sound,*

We cannot sing above the ground,

And while you're searching, ponder this:

We've taken what you'll sorely miss,

An hour long you'll have to look,

And to recover what we took,

But past an hour-the prospect's black,

Too late, it's gone, it won't come back."

Harry drew his head out, and shook his wet hair out of his eyes.

"Heard it?" said Cedric.

"Yeah… ' *Come seek us where our voices sound*…' and if you need persuading… hang on, I need to listen again…"

It took three underwater renditions of the egg's song before Harry had it memorised.

"So what do you think?" said Cedric. "I've got to go and look for people who can't use their voices above the ground… makes you think of some kind of underwater creature, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "I also think you won't have to travel far for the task. The only body of water close to Hogwarts is the lake. So I'm thinking some kind of underwater creature living in the lake."

"Could it be the giant squid?"

"I don't think so," said Harry. "The creature needs to have *voice*… wait, does the lake have merpeople *?* "

"It does!" said Hermione immediately. "There's a settlement at the bottom of the lake! It said so in *Hogwarts, A History* !"

"That's it, then," said Harry triumphantly. "The second task is go find the merpeople in the lake and retrieve whatever it is they've taken within an hour!"

There was a moment where everyone shared their excitement of having found out what the second task entailed. Harry overhead a few students marvelling at the fact he'd solved the puzzle in ten minutes. Cedric alone looked troubled.

"How am I supposed to *get* there?" he wondered. "The lake is supposed to be very deep… Have you any ideas?"

"Err…" said Harry, stumped. "Sorry, you're on your own on that…"

"I suppose it's only fair that I'd find that out myself," said Cedric, smiling again. "I really owe you big, Harry. That was *fantastic* ."

Harry couldn't help himself: "Meretricious."

"And a happy new year," piped Julia.

Cedric looked at them both curiously.

"You'll be fine," said Harry before Cedric could ask about it. "You've got three months to figure it out. That should be enough."

"I hope so," said Cedric, beaming. "Thanks again."

It was hours before Harry and his friends could leave the Hufflepuff common room and report to Sherlock. Sherlock's brow turned stormy when they told him all the ministry workers and dragon keepers had correctly corresponding names and faces.

"Footage, all of them," he demanded after a bout of silence.

"Later," said Julia firmly. "It takes time to collect all the footage and sort through them."

" *Fine*," Sherlock grumbled.

"Can we take a break until the second task?" asked Ron hopefully.

"Of course not," said Sherlock sharply. "There is no guarantee the agent will wait until then. You should also use the time to familiarize

yourselves with the methods the agent is using to infiltrate Hogwarts."

"But the Imperius Curse is illegal!" Hermione exclaimed. "You can get sentenced to life in Azkaban if you use it on another human being!"

"Those scruples may have to go if LV's return is the alternative," said Sherlock dismissively. "And I was thinking of the *other* more likely method the agent is using to infiltrate Hogwarts."

Light dawned in Hermione's eyes.

"The Polyjuice potion?"

"Yes," said Sherlock, nodding once. "It's one thing to know what the potion can do. It's another thing entirely to know all the subtle nuisances of the potion. I suggest you learn how to brew it and test the parameters yourselves."

Hermione and Julia alone looked excited at the prospect.

"How are we going to do that?" asked Ron. "The Music Room isn't equipped for potion making, and we have to get signed note from a teacher to get the book that has the recipe."

"Who is your Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher?" asked Sherlock impatiently.

Ron's mouth hung open. "Oh, yeah… Lupin could sign a note for us!"

"Once you've obtained the recipe, find an appropriate place to conduct your research and secure all the ingredients," Sherlock ordered. "Balance of probability is that the recipe will call for ingredients that require a special license. Tell me what they are so we can obtain them from different channels."

They nodded.

"Also find out what the second task involves," said Sherlock. "Depending on its nature, the ministry personnel who will come to

Hogwarts will change."

"We found that out already," said Ron quickly. "The champions have to go the bottom of the lake and get something from the merpeople down there."

"Excellent," said Sherlock in approval. "The second task won't need additional outside personnel, then. That just leaves the judges. Check them again when the day comes."

Harry and his friends started to discuss where they should brew the Polyjuice potion in secret after the call.

"Even if we use a portable fire and a spare cauldron, the Music Room is too open to the public," said Hermione. "So we *have* to brew it somewhere else."

"But where?" said Ron darkly. "I doubt there's an empty classroom we can use… Peeves will find out in a week and overturn the cauldron."

"I think," said Hermione thoughtfully, "if we make it sound like we're doing an independent potions project, we could get permission to use a classroom."

"But what would we call the project?" asked Julia. "And wouldn't Snape figure out what we're up to if and when he inspects our work?"

"Does the Marauder's map show any hidden rooms?" asked Ginny.

"If a room was bewitched to be hidden, it's probably unplottable," Hermione reasoned. "An unplottable room won't show up on a map."

Ron sighed. "I guess there's always the Moaning Myrtle's toilet."

"Or the Shrieking Shack," said Ginny.

"We can decide that later," said Harry. "For now, let's focus on getting the recipe. What's the book that has the recipe again?"

" *Moste Potente Potions*," said Hermione promptly. "We have

Defence this Thursday. Let's ask Lupin to sign us a note after class."

"I hope he's feeling well enough by then," said Harry worriedly. "He really didn't look good last Sunday…"

"And he wasn't there to teach this morning," said Ginny, looking equally worried. "Harry, do you think-"

Harry shook his head helplessly.

"I don't know, but I hope not."

Remus opened his eyes blearily. He was lying on an unfamiliar bed, in an entirely unfamiliar screened room, which smelled entirely foreign. The only familiar thing he could see was Sirius and John. They were both looking down at him, expressing equal parts concerned and relieved.

"Hi, Moony," said Sirius quietly. "Welcome back to the land of living."

"Where am I?" Remus slurred.

"The A&E," said John. "You had a heart attack after the full moon."

Remus blinked. " *Why* ?"

"Not sure, exactly, but I suspect your medication," said John grimly. "Snape says no one took it as long as you have. Chances are you're experiencing the long term side-effects."

Remus groaned. John gave him a look of deep sympathy.

"We'll have to think of something else."

Final Notes : Hermione doesn't form SPEW, but still manages to offend the elves. I couldn't write the Yule ball itself after Skeeter, the Hufflepuff party and Sherlock, sorry.

I wondered why Crouch!Moody had to steal from Snape in order to

brew the Polyjuice potion. Couldn't he have *bought* the ingredients and avoid suspicion? But if the key ingredients require a special license, then that would explain the stealing… and Snape, being the potions master of Hogwarts, would have the special license since he needs to teach the NEWT potion classes.

I have always wondered about the long-term side effects of taking Potions, so I thought to explore them through the Wolfsbane.

Respites in Disguise

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Fifty Nine: Respites in Disguise

Lestrade was accustomed to Sherlock leaving him in the dark until the very last minute. Therefore he was poleaxed when Sherlock decided to disclose his progress in the mid-point of his investigation.

Lestrade and Ellen was visiting 221B when it happened. Sirius was curiously absent and Sherlock chose to linger and watch the Triwizard Tournament's first task with them. Once the broadcast was over and Ellen and John started talking about mummy things, Sherlock bullied Lestrade into the kitchen, and there he informed Lestrade of the latest in flushing out LV's agent (i.e. identity still unknown). He also told him about Remus Lupin's sudden-but not entirely unexpected-heart attack, subsequent transfer to St. Mungo's and the setbacks this entailed.

After listening, Lestrade pinched the bridge of his nose several times to relieve his encroaching headache.

"Okay, now what?" Lestrade asked.

"Dumbledore told me about his substitute teacher," said Sherlock. "He's a retired Auror named Moody."

"He's bringing in an old-time wizard copper as a *teacher* ?"

"Yes. Moody incidentally possesses the highest Death Eater arrest rate among those who survived LV's reign of terror."

"Things are really serious, then."

Sherlock nodded once. "Dumbledore and I are in agreement that the agent made an attempt to spirit Harry away during the first task. LV pushed up his comeback timeline, it seems."

Lestrade suppressed a strong urge to swear. "How do you know?"

Sherlock pulled out a glass-case MMN phone. A few pokes on the screen later, the holographic image of Harry on flying broomstick circling around a sleepy-looking scarlet dragon that had a gold mane around its face projected out of the phone. Lestrade wondered how Sherlock could remain calm as he watched Harry expertly dodge a jet of fire snorted at his direction.

"The pivotal clue is this," said Sherlock, freezing the image for a moment and focusing into the badge hanging on Harry's neck. "Keep watch on the badge."

Sherlock resumed play. Harry yanked off the badge, stuffed it into his camera bag, and patted the Velcro cover firmly shut. The footage afterwards was Viktor Krum tackling the Hungarian Horntail from the perspective of Harry's camera bag. Lestrade again wondered why in the name of all things good the kids decided to delete this scene as he stared, mesmerized, at Harry saving one of the blokes trying to calm down the rampaging Horntail.

He didn't notice anything strange until the footage reached the part when Percy Weasley asked for the badges back and Harry couldn't find his from his camera bag.

"Wait, go back, I didn't see the badge falling out," said Lestrade.

Sherlock smirked in approval. "The badge didn't fall out."

"You mean it just *vanished* ?" said Lestrade incredulously before he reminded himself he was dealing with *magic* . And the moment he

remembered that, he knew what the problem was.

"The badge was a portkey."

"Obviously," said Sherlock. "It's was likely time-triggered. The agent also likely planned to provoke one of the dragons just before it activated."

"So everyone would be too busy staring at the dragon to pay attention to the cameraman, yeah?"

"Again, obvious," confirmed Sherlock. "But as it transpired, Krum saved him the trouble of personally poking a dragon in the eye and Harry decided to keep his badge inside his camera bag. Since he wasn't touching the badge directly, it didn't take him away."

Lestrade whistled. "Your kid is seriously lucky."

"In more ways than one," said Sherlock quietly. "The plan failed and the agent left a slew of clues… more than he ever intended, I'm sure. Now it's a matter of putting them together."

"What are the clues?"

"I don't have them all right now, but I know where you can find them."

In other words, Sherlock expected him to produce them, Lestrade thought.

"So what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I need a sample of Crouch and Bagman's DNA," said Sherlock.

"Why?"

"They are the only ministry officials who have the necessary access to the badges. Percy Weasley does as well, but I doubt the agent is using him: Too young, too new and Arthur didn't detect anything untoward from his son."

Lestrade marvelled at the fact Sherlock bothered to explain, rather

than just hissing: ' *just do it* !' as he normally did.

"Leave it to me."

"Make sure you get it when they're at the ministry," Sherlock warned.

"Will do," Lestrade promised.

While Lestrade and Sherlock commiserated in the kitchen, John and Ellen Lestrade shared their respective baby's latest shenanigans.

"I tried sleep training Benedict," said John.

"How did it go?"

"It was a disaster," said John wearily. "He wouldn't stop crying. I mean it. He cried so much he couldn't even breathe properly. I *had* to pick him up. He's been refusing to sleep alone since then. He starts hyperventilating if I put him down and act like I'm going to leave." John looked down at Benedict, who was drooling rivers on his mummy's chest. "I think he's traumatized."

"No, he isn't," said Ellen confidently. "He's just not ready to sleep through the night, that's all. Try again at six months."

John exhaled, "Okay."

"Why did you want to sleep train him now?" Ellen asked.

"I needed him to sleep more," said John evasively.

"Why do you need him to sleep more?" Ellen pressed. "I feel like it's not because you're sleep deprived."

John smiled wryly.

"It's stupid," said John, "Utterly stupid. I wanted to get back in shape."

" *Why* ? You're still nursing!"

"In case the Wizarding World goes to war," said John quietly. "It's not a set thing, but… the best brains in the UK have been working to foil LV since Halloween, and even though they know what to look for and how to identify him, they *still* haven't found his agent."

Ellen Lestrade covered her mouth and let out a soft ' *oh* '.

"Not exactly a vote of confidence, my attitude," John went on. "But things don't look good to me right now. I have to prepare for the worst. But then again I *can't* ."

There was a beat.

"I understand," said Ellen. "I mean… I don't know. Magic is, like, something over *there*, a different world thing, and usually we can treat it like that. But, like, LV won't let us, if he comes back."

"No," John muttered. "Plus Harry is LV's archenemy."

"Ohmygosh, you're right," said Ellen, eyes round. "That makes you a target, doesn't it?"

John nodded. "If I were him, I'd assassinate me and Sherlock first."

"That's horrible!" Ellen exclaimed. "Do you really feel like-"

"Doesn't matter what I *feel*," said John flatly. "If the enemy thinks it is good strategy, chances are he'll use it. This is a simple matter of *fact* ."

Ellen shut her moth, and the two sat in a bout of quiet.

"You are like a pillar," Ellen marvelled. "Seriously, I don't even know how you can stay calm. I'd be, like, scared out of my wits and sobbing every day."

"I actually am scared out of my wits," said John matter-of-factly.

Ellen stared. "You don't look it."

"I try not to freak out in front of people, particularly Sherlock and Harry," said John grimly. "They never did well when I do."

There was another bout of quiet, and this one was much longer than the previous.

"I can stand a magical war if it was just me," John murmured at length. "I can cope. But now I have Benedict. How am I supposed to protect him and Harry both from *wizards* ?"

Ellen just looked at John helplessly. At length John held Benedict tightly, her eyes shiny and her glance faraway.

"Is it wrong for me to wish he had never been born?" John whispered.

Ellen wrapped her arms around John and murmured several prayers.

Later that night, miles away from London, a mobile phone started ringing inside the Hufflepuff girl's dormitory. The owner of the phone, Julia Lestrade, woke up with a start at the piercing sound. Then she groaned and started groping for the phone. Several books on her four-poster bed at her either side fell to the floor when she searched her bedside cabinet, and the long roll of parchment she'd been reading before falling asleep slid off as she lifted her bedcovers.

At length Julia located her glasses (under her pillow for some curious reason), the ringing phone (found wedged between the pages of her copy of *Standard Book of Spells, Grade 3*) and connected the call.

" *Hello* ?" she grouched.

"Hi Julia," said Ellen's voice. "Sorry to wake you up, babe, but this is important."

"Why? What happened?" asked Julia, alarmed.

"There's something I need to know," said Ellen urgently. "Tell me- *just tell me!* -what are you and Harry doing about this LV agent?"

Julia groaned loudly.

"Why do you need to know *now*, all of a sudden?" she complained.

"Harry's mum is freaking out so I need to know what to do!" Ellen cried.

The grumpy expression on Julia fell off.

"… Okay," she said. "Okay, just give me a minute, and I'll tell you everything…"

Three weeks passed since the first Triwizard Tournament task happened. Winter was in full swing now, and several blizzards had already swept through Hogwarts's landscape and castle. On the particular day in December, the skies were grey and stormy-much like Ron's mood since he encountered Rita Skeeter.

Ron felt sick in the stomach whenever he recalled the incident. There he was, innocently heading to the Great Hall with Harry, Hermione, Ginny and Neville rather late because the five of them stayed up until 2 AM in the morning plotting how they were going to brew the Polyjuice potion in secret. As they walked across the entrance hall, Ernie Macmillan accosted them.

"Ron Weasley, I just wanted to let you know I don't believe what the *Daily Prophet* says," he said pompously.

Harry looked as mystified as Ron felt.

"Okay," said Ron. "Thanks, I guess."

Ernie nodded and then rejoined his fellow Hufflepuffs. At the Great Hall's doors, they met Cedric Diggory, who was carrying a stack of toast in a napkin and had the morning edition of the *Daily Prophet* tucked under his arm.

"Good morning," he said. "Listen, can we talk in private? I need to tell you something."

"Uh, sure," said Ron, feeling increasingly uneasy.

The six of them went looking for an empty classroom. Once they secured one, Cedric showed them Rita Skeeter's published piece.

Her article wasn't so much of a scathing report on their rude behaviour, let alone a report on the Triwizard Tournament, but a tantalizing preview promising series of articles that would write about the colourful life story of Harry Potter:

Harry Potter is a boy of mystery. Even though it has been four years since his return to the wizarding world, very little is known about his life following his historic defeat of You-Know-Who. What little is known only compounds the air mystery surrounding the Boy-Who-Lived. His reputation as Hogwarts' best spell-caster is vouched for and repeatedly demonstrated. Just recently, he saved dragon keeper Bartholomew Bellentine from a Hungarian Horntail, which went on a rampage at the Triwizard Tournament's first task. He then quietly left the enclosure, neither receiving nor seeking acknowledgement for his courageous deed. The writer has interviewed several students since witnessing the incident herself, and as one they have claimed it was 'just the sort of thing Potter would do.'

One would expect such a person to have friends of similar temperament. Yet the people surrounding Harry Potter as friends are most curious. There is the Hogwarts champion Cedric Diggory, who has previously claimed to have defeated Potter in a duel (this turns out to be false). Then there is Arnold Weasley, a fellow fourth year, who claims to lead the Triwizard Tournament filming efforts. The writer finds the latter claim hard to believe; Ms. Jacqueline Shin, owner of the Magical Mobile Network, refused to comment and Weasley has not once been seen filming. Also, when invited to an interview, Weasley responded with derogatory language…

Hermione and Julia's response was lightning swift. Hermione declared they must broadcast what *really* happened, and Julia put together a short holographic film of their meeting with Skeeter in thirty minutes. The film was aired over the Magical Mobile Network as a special announcement. But before the announcement was seen by all, Ron was an open target. Predictably, Malfoy was the first to make snide comment about it.

"Ah, look, boys, it's the *leader* of the tournament filming," he said to Crabbe and Goyle the moment he got within earshot of Ron at Care of Magical Creatures. "Really doesn't look the part, does he? Personally I think he's faking it for a bit of recognition. Yes, that's probably what it is. The reporter didn't even bother to get his *name* right… I mean, if he were really *that* important, they'd go through the trouble to *ask*, wouldn't they?"

Crabbe and Goyle guffawed sycophantically, but Malfoy had to stop there, because Hagrid emerged from the back of his cabin balancing a teetering tower of crates, each containing a very large Blast-Ended Skrewt. To the class's horror, Hagrid announced Professor Kettleburn had the flu and that they will be taking care of the skrewts that day. Then he proceeded to explain that the reason the skrewts had been killing one another was an excess of pent-up energy, and that the solution would be for each student to fix a leash on a skrewt and take it for a short walk. The only good thing about this plan was that it distracted Malfoy completely.

"Take this thing for a *walk* ?" he repeated in disgust, staring into one of the boxes. "And where exactly are we supposed to fix the leash? Around the sting, the blasting end or the sucker?"

"Roun' the middle," said Hagrid, demonstrating. "Er- yeh might want ter put on yer dragon-hide gloves, jus' as an extra precaution, like. Ron- you come here an' help me with this big one…"

Hagrid's real intention, however, was to talk to Ron away from the rest of the class. He waited until everyone else had set off with their skrewts, then turned to Ron and said with furious pride. "So… yeh started yer own company and it's doin' well, looks like. Congratulations."

"You believe I am, then?" said Ron, concealing with difficulty the rush of gratitude he felt at Hagrid's words.

"Course I do," Hagrid grunted. "Jack says she can' do it without yeh and I've seen yeh spendin' *hours* in the evenin' workin' fer her in the Music Room."

"Wish everyone else was so reasonable," said Ron bitterly.

The pair of them looked out over the lawn; the class was widely scattered now, and all in great difficulty. The skrewts were no longer shell-less and colourless, but had developed a kind of thick, greyish, shiny armour. They looked like a cross between giant scorpions and elongated crabs-but still without recognisable heads or eyes. They had become immensely strong and very hard to control.

"Look like they're havin' fun, don' they?" Hagrid said happily.

"Yeah, lots of fun," Ron muttered. He assumed Hagrid was talking about the skrewts, because his classmates certainly weren't; every now and then, with an alarming bang, one of the skrewts' ends would explode, causing it to shoot forward several yards, and more than one person was being dragged along on their stomach, trying desperately to get back on their feet.

"Ah, I don' know, Ron," Hagrid sighed suddenly, looking back down at him with a sympathetic expression on his face. "Yer such an ordinary-lookin' bloke… someone who doesn' know yeh might find it hard to believe yer directin' the MMN."

Ron didn't answer. Yes, no one seemed to think he could do something impressive like direct a famous business because he didn't look like he could. Unfortunately, Ron could see why. He still owned battered hand-me-downs and wore second-hand school robes. He now had the money to buy new stuff, of course, but he didn't have the time to think about buying new things. Also, he was an average student from a poor pure-blood family, and the Magical Mobile Network was the greatest innovation of the century that relied on Muggle technology. Hermione, who was both the cleverest witch of their year and a Muggle-born, and Harry, who wore his Muggle upbringing on his sleeve and was often better at spells than Hermione, fit the part better.

The days following Rita's published piece were among the worst in his life. Ron expected nothing less than vicious insults from the Slytherins-he was unpopular there, because of Malfoy and his best friend was Harry Potter, who so often helped Gryffindor beat them, both at Quidditch and in the Inter-House Championship. But he didn't expect to get hurled with so much contempt from non-Slytherins-including his fellow Gryffindors. Seamus flat-out told Ron

he didn't believe he was the director and Dean's silence strongly suggested he agreed with him. In the hallways, the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs made similar comments in very loud voices.

"Hey Weasley, just because Potter doesn't mind you, doesn't mean you can pretend to be whatever!"

"Yeah, what do you *really* do?"

"Ignore them," Hermione muttered under her breath while Ron seethed. "Just ignore them…"

The idea Harry might be the real business director of the MMN only solidified after their first Defence Against the Dark Arts class, led by their substitute teacher, Alastor 'Mad-eye' Moody.

Moody made quite an impression when he first limped into their classroom, his each step generating a dull clunk. His face alone spawned an awed silence. It looked as though it had been carved out of weathered wood by someone who had only the vaguest idea of what human faces are supposed to look like and was none too skilled with a chisel. Every inch of skin seemed to be scarred. The mouth looked like a diagonal gash, and a large chunk of the nose was missing. But it was the man's eyes that made him frightening. One of them was small, dark, and beady. The other was large, round as a coin, and a vivid, electric blue. The blue eye was moving ceaselessly, without blinking, and was rolling up, down, and from side to side, quite independently of the normal eye-and then it rolled right over, pointing into the back of the man's head, so that all they could see was whiteness.

Once at the teacher's podium, Moody took out a register, shook his long mane of grizzled grey hair out of his twisted and scarred face, and began to call out names, his normal eye moving steadily down the list while his magical eye swivelled around, fixing upon each student as he or she answered.

"Right then," he said, when the last person had declared themselves present. "I've had a letter from Professor Lupin about this class; seems like you have a thorough grounding in tackling everyday curses and have just started learning about the stronger ones."

There was a general murmur of assent.

"So that's where I'm going to pick up," said Moody. "I'm going to bring you up to scratch on what wizards can do to each other. So brace yourselves, because I'm going to assume Dumbledore is telling me nothing but the honest truth when he said he has full confidence in your nerves…"

Moody told them he was going to continue Lupin's lessons on the Unforgivable Curses. Unlike Lupin, he wasn't content to just tell them what they were, what they did or tell them stories of their use from his Auror days. No, after demonstrating all three on a spider, Moody announced he would be putting the Imperius Curse on each of them in turn, to demonstrate its power and to see whether they could resist its effects.

"But- but Professor Lupin said it's *illegal*," said Hermione uncertainly as Moody cleared away the desks with a sweep of his wand, leaving a large clear space in the middle of the room. "He said-to use it against another human was-"

"Dumbledore wants you taught what it feels like," said Moody, his magical eye swivelling onto Hermione and fixing her with an eerie, unblinking stare, "If you'd rather learn the hard way - when someone's putting it on you so they can control you completely - fine by me. You're excused. Off you go."

He pointed one gnarled finger toward the door. Hermione went very pink and muttered something about not meaning that she wanted to leave. Harry and Ron grinned at each other. They knew Hermione would rather eat bubotuber pus than miss such an important lesson.

Moody began to beckon students forward in turn and put the Imperius Curse upon them. Ron watched as, one by one, his classmates did the most extraordinary things under its influence. Dean Thomas hopped three times around the room, singing the national anthem. Lavender Brown imitated a squirrel. Neville performed a series of quite astonishing gymnastics he would certainly not have been capable of in his normal state. Not one of them seemed to be able to fight off the curse, and each of them recovered only when Moody had removed it.

"Potter," Moody growled, "you next."

Harry moved forward into the middle of the classroom, into the space that Moody had cleared of desks. Moody raised his wand, pointed it at Harry, and said, " *Imperio* !"

A familiar look of placid unconcern washed over Harry's face. Then he bent his knees, looking as though he was about to jump on a nearby desk.

Then something about his glance changed. He seemed to be fighting an internal battle of some sort. In the end Harry both tried to jump and not jump at the same time, which resulted in him smashing headlong into the desk and knocking it over.

"Now, *that's* more like it!" growled Moody as Harry shakily got back to his feet. "Look at that, you lot… Potter fought! He fought it, and he damn near beat it! We'll try that again, Potter, and the rest of you, pay attention- watch his eyes, that's where you see it- very good, Potter, very good indeed! They'll have trouble controlling *you* !"

"The way he talks," Harry muttered as he hobbled out of the Defence Against the Dark Arts class an hour later (Moody had insisted on putting Harry through his paces four times in a row, until Harry could throw off the curse entirely), "you'd think we were all going to be attacked any second."

"Yeah, I know," said Ron. Privately he wondered how Harry fought the curse at all, for he had no clue how anyone *could* . When Moody put the curse on him, he was enveloped with the most wonderful feeling. Ron felt a floating sensation as every thought and worry in his head was wiped gently away, leaving nothing but a vague, untraceable happiness. He stood there feeling immensely relaxed, only dimly aware of everyone watching him. Then he heard Mad-Eye Moody's voice, echoing in some distant chamber of his empty brain: *skip every other step… skip ever other step…*

Ron obediently skipped every alternative step. He felt the empty, echoing feeling in his head disappear some time later, but he still found himself skipping. Moody assured him the effects would wear off by dinner time, but that didn't stop Ron from remembering what

exactly had happened. It was humiliating to lose control so completely in front of his classmates, especially when everyone doubted his abilities, both as a wizard and as a businessman.

"Listen, people will know what really happened soon," said Harry, looking like he knew what Ron was thinking (and he probably did). "We put out a special announcement and people can't use their phones until they see it. Just give it time."

Eventually, enough people did view the special announcement to get angry at Skeeter, but the announcement still managed to backfire on Ron. Many students, particularly the girls, disliked his passive reaction to Skeeter and didn't hesitate to tell him so:

"You were just standing there and let that woman do whatever! And you call yourself a friend?" accused a curly-haired third year Ron had never seen before.

"And where were *you* when I had to face that horrible Skeeter cow?" Harry shot-back angrily.

The girl went away looking rather hurt, but there were others just like her queuing up to shout at Ron. Miss Jackie offered to invite the *Daily Prophet* to a press conference after someone sent a Howler through the Owl Post. Ron couldn't bring himself to agree because he knew Miss Jackie was deathly afraid of all reporters, ever since Skeeter practically assaulted her at Hogsmeade last year.

"Maybe I should just quit," said Ron. Mr. Jeremy had suggested the idea of taking a more hidden role to Ron over the phone, saying the media uproar over him could harm the OBH's future.

"Don't you dare," said Miss Jackie sternly. "The *Prophet* is targeting you because you've made the MMN their first major competitor in two hundred years."

"Errr, how?" Ron asked.

"The bulletin board," said Miss Jackie. "You put it up last summer, remember?"

The bulletin board was an offshoot of the Magical Mobile Network's

phone user manual and the precursor of the Quidditch World Cup viewer. All it did was allow people to 'post' holographic photos and short films to a virtual board accessible to all MMN users. Ron had opened it to the public as a free service because Miss Jackie wanted to test the Network's ability to share images to all users. He'd completely forgotten about it because he was so busy with the Quidditch World Cup broadcast project.

"Why is the bulletin board hurting the *Prophet* ?" asked Ron.

"Businesses are posting their ads there," said Miss Jackie. "And some users post photocopies of the *Prophet* . Do you know what this means?"

It clicked immediately.

"They're losing customers," said Ron slowly. "Why subscribe to a newspaper if you can read it for free? Why pay for an ad in the *Prophet* when not as many people are reading it?"

"And why pay for an ad at all if you can post it for free somewhere people view all the time?" said Miss Jackie. "The bulletin board is very popular. It's a bit messy right now, but once I make it look pretty and organized, it will explode."

"Yeah," said Ron, before adding: "Eh, do you have time to, though?"

Miss Jackie put on her Iron Lady face, something Ron hadn't seen since he was second year.

"Ron, the *Daily Prophet* just publicly slandered my most valuable employee. Do you think I'm going to just sit down and take it?"

Ron gaped. "But… I'm your *only* employee."

" *Exactly*," said Miss Jackie severely. "So don't worry, Ron. I'll do something about this…"

Ron left the meeting wondering what Miss Jackie would do. He couldn't imagine her doing something that would harm someone in anyway. But then again, when Miss Jackie threatened to do something, *she did it*, and nothing short of death and immobilization

was going to stop her. Which inclination would win out?

He didn't see anything indicating what Miss Jackie was doing in the days that followed, but he did notice she was working a lot (again). Meanwhile, Ron had to suffer his family rising up to his defence on top of the hate pouring from all sides. His father and mother exhorted him to keep his head held high, for they knew the truth and that was what really mattered. Ginny said she'd slapped a couple of third years when they told her they thought he was a fake or a bad friend. Fred and George, the prats, paraded in front of him in the halls, shouting: "make way for the director of the Magical Mobile Network, the greatest enterprise since self-stirring cauldrons… !" but then would tell him in private to not let the *Daily Prophet* get to him. His aunts, uncles and cousins from all over told him to cheer up except Great Aunt Muriel, who sent a long note that scathingly said she was disappointed in him and threatened to cut him off if he didn't keep his toe out of the line. Since she'd threatened to disinherit him and his brothers on a regular basis, ever since Fred pranked her at age seven, this didn't bother Ron all that much.

All in all, it was a horrible three weeks. His friends, Harry and Hermione particularly, stood up for him throughout and for that he was very grateful. Nevertheless, Ron found it hard to be around those two, as they were a large part of the reason why he was in his current situation in the first place. He felt disgusted at himself for even having these thoughts, but they were still *there* .

So he took a break. Harry understood, though he wasn't happy about it. Hermione wouldn't leave him alone, though, and kept trying to talk to him. Ron avoided her as much as he could, but had limited success because they shared so many classes. Hermione used every opportunity to whisper to him under her breath when she wasn't trying to corner him. Seamus Finnigan checked his cauldron for leaks the one time she hissed to him nonstop at Potions.

Oddly, Cedric Diggory was the person Ron could talk most freely to during his break. Cedric was *still* receiving heat from their fellow students because of Rita Skeeter's articles, therefore he knew very well what Ron was going through. Also, Cedric just listened when Ron ranted and gave him deep sympathetic looks.

"Are you and Harry okay? I haven't seen you around him lately," Cedric asked after one ranting session.

"We're good," said Ron, "Just taking a break."

"He's okay with that?"

"I don't think he minds."

That naturally led them to talking about Harry.

"I didn't know how to take it when Harry warned me about the dragons," Cedric said. "I knew he was telling me the truth, but… I thought he wouldn't want to have anything to do with me, especially since that fight."

Ron stared at him, "Did he really?"

"Yeah," said Cedric, grinning. "And I'm glad he did. I might have passed out cold from the shock otherwise."

Cedric told Ron how his friends gave him the cold shoulder after the fight in the entrance hall, because they thought he'd ratted on them. Their relations only started to improve since the first task. Ron told Cedric his twin brothers, Fred and George, started tormenting him for 'breaking up' with Harry (seriously). Their camaraderie was odder than a two headed dog with five legs, but there you go.

About a week before Christmas break, Ron felt good enough to go back. Cedric was quite happy about the news. Then he asked an odd question.

"Who are going to the ball with?"

"What ball?" Ron asked.

Cedric frowned at him.

"The *Yule Ball*," he said. "McGonagall should've announced it a week ago."

"She did?" said Ron blankly. He hadn't been paying attention to

much, least of all his classes.

"It's a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament," Cedric explained. "It's going to be held on Christmas evening. I can't back out because I'm champion, and I have to have a dance partner… we're supposed to open the ball."

Ron really didn't envy him. "So who are you taking?"

"Cho Chang," said Cedric, grinning a bit. "I'm surprised she said yes. For a while I thought I'd have to ask the Moaning Myrtle."

Ron was more shocked that he had time to ask a girl out. "Right…"

"You might still find someone," said Cedric encouragingly. "There's still time left."

"Yeah," said Ron sceptically.

Cedric returned the Hufflepuff common room and Ron headed upstairs to the Gryffindor tower afterwards. About mid-way, it dawned on Ron that he *had* to find a partner. George put his name down on the list of students staying at school during the Christmas holidays, which meant he was going to the Yule Ball.

"How am I supposed to do that?" Ron wondered.

Ron was still thinking about the horrible prospect of asking a girl out to a ball when he climbed over the portrait hole. His horror was momentarily replaced with apprehension when he found Harry sharing a table with Neville in the very crowded common room. Then Harry looked up and caught the sight of Ron approaching a bit nervously.

"There you are," he said lightly. "I wondered where you were at."

Ron felt immensely relieved. "Harry, I-"

"It's okay," Harry said, before he could finish. "It's fine."

"But…"

"It's really okay."

Ron grinned nervously at him, and Harry grinned back.

"So what's up with this Yule Ball?" asked Ron, feeling at peace as he sat down at their table. "Who are you taking?"

"Not going," said Harry firmly.

"What, why?" said Ron, derailed.

Harry gave him a look that said he couldn't believe he had to spell out the reasons.

"It's Sirius's first Christmas as a free man," he said. "It's Benedict's first Christmas, too."

Ron gaped a little. "Oh yeah… so you're going home?"

"Uh-huh."

Ron felt very disappointed. He was hoping he would be able to share the pain of going to a ball with him.

"What about you, Neville?" he asked.

"No one yet," Neville said anxiously. "I asked Hermione, but she said no."

Why wouldn't she, Ron thought, but Neville wasn't done speaking.

"She said someone asked her already and she said yes," he said.

" *What* ?!" said Ron, more loudly than he'd attended, but the news flabbergasted him so much he couldn't help it. "Who!?"

"She didn't say," said Neville miserably. "I really wanted her to say yes, you know. She's always nice to me, helping me out at class, and…"

Ron goggled while Neville rambled on. He didn't know what Neville

was saying because his brain kept circling around the idea of someone asking Hermione to the ball. When did this happen? *How* did this happen? No. No, it couldn't be. Hermione was probably just lying. *It just wasn't true.*

"… Do you think Ginny will say yes?" Neville was saying when Ron's thoughts stopped circling.

"Won't hurt to try," said Harry.

Neville nodded. "Ron, you don't mind?"

Ron shook his head absently, not really paying attention to what he was saying no to, as he was still reeling at the news about Hermione. Neville drew in a deep breath, squared his shoulders, then told them he was going downstairs for dinner and hopefully, he would find Ginny there and ask.

Neville had just left when Hermione climbed in through the portrait hole.

"Why aren't you at dinner?" she said, coming over to their table. Then she gave a cold look at Ron. "Are you done with your tantrum, Ron Weasley?"

"Yes, thank you for being so patient," Ron snapped. "So why did you lie?"

"What are you talking about?" said Hermione, frowning.

"You lied to Neville! You told him you were going to the ball with someone!"

"I wasn't lying," said Hermione, frowning. "Someone did ask and I agreed."

"Who?"

"That's none of your business," Hermione snapped. "And you have no right to ask me after ignoring me for weeks."

But Ron really wanted to know. "Okay, fine, I'm sorry. I was an arse.

Please forgive me. So who asked you?"

"I'm not telling," said Hermione, now blushing. "You're just going to make fun of me."

"C'mon, you can tell us," Ron wheedled.

" *No*," said Hermione flatly.

Ron was about to retort she must be really lying, then, when he noticed something. First it was Hermione's front teeth, which were smaller than he remembered them being. But as he looked for other things that were out of the norm, he noticed something else.

He knew what Hermione looked like. He'd spent three years as her friend, thus could spot her in an overcrowded corridor from twenty feet away, even without seeing her face. But until now he didn't realise Hermione was filling out and turning *curvy*, like real woman. And her face, it was different from what he *remembered* seeing. It looked mature somehow, more like the striking woman she was slowly growing to be.

"Hermione, Neville's right - you are a *girl*… !" Ron blurted out.

"Oh well spotted," Hermione said acidly.

"No wonder he asked you," he marvelled.

"Yes, no wonder," said Hermione, and her eyes flashed dangerously. "Just because it's taken you three years to notice, Ron, doesn't mean no one else has spotted I'm a girl!"

Ron stared at her. Then he grinned again.

"Okay, okay, I know you're a girl," he said. "That do? Will you go with me?"

"I've already told you!" Hermione said very angrily. "I'm going with someone else! So stop talking like I'm lying!"

Then she stormed off toward the girls' dormitories.

"She's lying," said Ron flatly, watching her go.

"She isn't," said Harry.

"Who is it then?" said Ron sharply.

"No idea," said Harry indifferently. "And no, I have not and will not deduce who."

Ron couldn't help but notice the unusual coolness Harry was directing at Hermione. Harry went up to the boy's dormitory abruptly, saying he wasn't hungry. Ron, who *was* hungry, went down to the Great Hall so he could have dinner and check on Neville. Ron knew from the immensely relieved look on Neville's face that Ginny had agreed to go to the ball with him. Figuring he'd be a good mood, Ron asked:

"What's up with Harry and Hermione?"

"They had a disagreement over house-elves," Neville explained. "Hermione wanted to start this… movement. She said it was an outrage elves were enslaved for centuries and no one thought to do something about it."

"But they like it," said Ron incredulously. "They like being enslaved!"

"She thinks they only like it because they're uneducated and brainwashed," said Neville, shaking his head. "Harry agrees the current elf situation isn't good, but he also thinks Hermione is going about it the wrong way. She wanted us to lobby for fair working conditions and wages for all elves, you see."

"So they fought?"

"They had a row," Neville confirmed. "But then they made up. They agreed they shouldn't fight when LV's agent is still at large."

"But they're still fighting!" said Ron. "Doesn't that mean they haven't really?"

"I don't know about the latest fight," said Neville, shrugging his shoulders helplessly. "Julia might know."

Ron cornered Julia after dinner and asked.

"They had a misunderstanding," said Julia wryly. "Since the teachers announced the Yule Ball, all these girls started queuing up to ask Harry to be their partner, but he said no to all of them. Hermione asked why, and Harry told her if he *must* go, he's not going with someone he doesn't know."

"She had a problem with that?" Ron asked.

"No," said Julia. "The problem is: she thought Harry meant he would rather go with her, me or *Ginny* ."

" *Ooooh…* "

"Of course, what he *actually* meant was that he would rather not go to the ball, full stop. I mean, isn't he the type to say: ' *eff you, you can't make me!* ' to this sort of thing?" Julia briefly waved both of her fists without actually raising any fingers. "In Hermione's defence, it did look like he'd have to go to the Ball whether he wanted to or not. Sherlock wanted a sample of Crouch's DNA. He asked my dad first, but Dad was having trouble getting it."

"What's DNA?"

"Genetic information," said Julia. "The biological information system that lets you pass down your family traits to your descendants," she tried again at Ron's stupefied face. "The thing you lot call 'it's in the blood!'" After seeing Ron's persistently clueless face, she gave up. "Sherlock wanted the cup Crouch drank out of, his blood or a stand of his hair; whatever Harry could get his hands on without getting caught."

That sounded more like the mad things Sherlock would request. "Okay. But how is going to the ball let Harry get that stuff?"

"Crouch is one of the judges, so he'll show up for the ball," Julia explained.

"Ah," said Ron, comprehending for a moment, before he became confused again. "But Harry said he isn't going. What changed?"

"John vetoed. *Violently,* " said Julia. "She was seriously beating up Sherlock." Julia made vigorous flapping motions to mime someone slapping someone else's head.

" *You saw that* ?!" Ron screeched.

"Oh yes," Julia grinned.

Ron deeply regretted not being there to see the sight.

"That wouldn't have stopped Sherlock, though," he said.

"No," said Julia. "He only relented when Dad got him the evidence he wanted."

"How did your Dad manage?"

"Used the oldest trick in the police officer's book," said Julia proudly. "Once he found Crouch in the Ministry, he came over and said: 'Hey mate, you look parched. Can I get you something to drink?' Crouch said: 'just tea, thank you.' Dad gave Crouch a cuppa, Crouch took a sip, put the cup down, and went away. Dad collected the cup."

Ron goggled. "That's *it* ?"

"That's all he needed," said Julia. "Anyway, since Sherlock has his sample, Harry didn't need to go to the Ball. But by then Hermione was already running with the assumption that Harry was going to ask Ginny to the ball."

Ron winced. "Then Harry tells the happy news that he's going home. Kaboom goes Hermione's plans."

"Basically," said Julia wryly.

"Why did she even think Harry would ask Ginny?" Ron asked. "I mean, Ginny *has* liked Harry for ages, but I didn't think it was mutual. I mean, wouldn't he ask *you* ?"

"I said I was going to refuse even if he did ask," Julia replied.

"How come?" Ron asked, startled.

"I don't like balls," said Julia quietly, "Too noisy and public."

"You're still going, though."

"I have to," Julia grumbled. "Uncle Jason told me I'm not allowed to go home, I have to go to the ball. When I said no one's going ask me, Uncle Jeremy said just go and ask someone myself."

Ron stared. "What about your grandpa?"

Julia shook her head sadly. "He said he's not going to help me."

Ron stared some more. "I would've thought he wouldn't want you to go."

"You would think," said Julia grumpily. "And he didn't want my mum and Auntie Jack to… fraternize with guys when they were young. Result: Auntie Jack obeyed so well she's still single at age thirty-one, while my mum turned rebellious and married my dad. Let's face it, before his real family background came to light, my dad wasn't exactly marriage material."

It wasn't often you met someone who adored their father and called him non-marriage material at the same breath, Ron thought.

"So he's determined not to make the same mistake," said Julia, crunching her face.

"Your family is seriously weird," Ron declared.

"Dear me, you've discovered our deepest darkest secret," said Julia sardonically. "Now I must kill you."

Ron snorted. Then an idea tickled his mind.

"Are you going with someone?" Ron asked as casually as he could.

"Nah," she replied, making Ron's heart leap. "The only person who asked was Draco Malfoy, and I'd rather go by myself than go with *him* ."

The only thing Ron could think in response to that was: *Oh Merlin,*

thank you, thank you, thank you!

"Want to go with me?" he asked hopefully.

Julia looked surprised. Ron crossed his fingers as she contemplated the idea.

At length she grinned.

"Okay."

Final Notes : I love writing from Ron's perspective; he's hilarious and can talk about his *feelings* (how many guys can do that?). Sherlock slowly head towards the solution… but will he be on time?!

ASIM has passed the milestone of 1,000,000 views. I'm in a state of shock. Thank you, dear readers!

The Yule Ball

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty: The Yule Ball

In the weeks leading to Christmas, the Met experienced the usual surge in cases of theft, fraud, domestic violence and assault. After two weeks of handling Christmas themed Muggle-baiting cases on top of his December workload, Lestrade gave in and started to use magic at work-at one point actually taking Cecilia's wand out from storage and using it. He later wondered why he hadn't done this earlier after finishing his paperwork in half the time it normally took him (finding old case files was a simple matter-just use a summoning charm and *voila* : the folder came flying towards him). Thus Lestrade ended up having the incredible luxury of free time, in short ten minute doses, which he spent doing pointless things like throwing darts at a printed photo of Father Christmas.

On the particular day in late December, Lestrade was spending his free time contemplating the small glass jar of honey on his desk. The jar just sat innocently, the beautiful golden-orange-brown shade of its contents glowing under the florescent lights.

Lestrade was still at it when Bradstreet stopped by his office.

"Why are you staring at that honey jar?" he asked.

Lestrade looked up. "Sherlock sent it."

This time Bradstreet stared at Greg.

" *Why* ?"

"He says it an early Christmas present."

"But in reality?"

"Still an early Christmas present," said Lestrade, amazed. "John says he's been into urban beekeeping. This is the result."

There was a pause.

" *Why the bloody hell is Sherlock Holmes keeping bees* ?!" howled Bradstreet, making everyone in the bullpen stare.

"Dunno," said Lestrade. "Either he's training them to attack people on command or fatherhood is making him weird… *weirder*, I mean."

Bradstreet made an odd noise, much like a balloon half-full of marbles letting out air.

"That's violation of code twenty-three-thirteen! No Reminders of Sherlock Holmes Procreating!"

Lestrade refrained from telling Bradstreet he violated Code Twenty-Three-Thirteen himself by saying that.

"Want some?" Lestrade asked after Bradstreet finished being dramatic.

"Yeah," said Bradstreet immediately. "Got toast?"

"Mmmhmmm," said Lestrade as he took out his stash of crumpets.

"Seriously, though. What the heck?" Bradstreet asked as he sat down.

Lestrade rolled his eyes. "How should I know? I'm not actually an expert in Sherlock psychology!"

"Liar; I know for fact you and your wife have been visiting Baker Street regularly," said Bradstreet as he smeared honey all over his halved crumpet.

This time Lestrade huffed.

"You and the rest of the Uniform lads need to stop spying on Baker Street. And no, that doesn't count as evidence. The wife likes having me around when she goes to have play dates with John Watson."

Bradstreet choked on the crumpet he bit into.

"Daargh… ! Twenty-Three-Thirteen… ! That's another Twenty-Three-Thirteen… !"

While the news of Sherlock Holmes taking up *apiculture* spread through the Met's Finest like a video gone viral, the finest witches and wizards of the upcoming generation were doing as little to further their magical knowledge as possible as the term came to a close. That is, all except Hermione Granger, who was reviewing her potions notes on antidotes in the noisy Gryffindor Common Room.

"I can't believe you're not going to the ball," she overhead Seamus Finnigan saying to Harry at a neighboring table.

"Your disbelief won't change the facts," said Harry mildly.

"Most people would change their minds when so many girls ask him out," grumbled Dean Thomas. "How could you say no all of them? The last one was quite a looker, too."

"She was a foot taller than me. Imagine what I'd look like trying to dance with her."

Hermione sighed through her nose. Exchanges like these were a conundrum. On the one hand, spending as much time as possible with family made more sense than going to a fancy Ball to someone like Harry, who probably had the thought of his possible death constantly sitting in the back of his head. On the other hand, Harry practically invited people to say all sorts of insensitive comments by

refusing to go to the much anticipated Yule Ball without telling the real reasons. But then again, how could he possibly talk about those reasons? He had had a difficult time admitting them even to his closest friends…

Navigating around this new Harry was a challenge, Hermione mused. He didn't brood as much, but there was a definite increase in the length of his silences and solo walks around the grounds. He was also firmer about keeping frivolous and pointless activities to bare minimum, the Yule Ball being the latest example of thereof. You could never tell what would trigger him to withdraw into his head, but you could tell when it did happen very easily, but by then it was too late. Neville didn't report any Danger Nights-Ron was no help at all, the tantrum-throwing idiot- but he couldn't say Harry was spending the nights *sleeping* . Hermione imagined him staying awake late into the night, turning the case in his head over and over.

All things considered, Hermione couldn't *wait* until Sherlock solved the Problem of how to uncover You-Know-Who's agent. The Problem was unlike any case she and her friends got involved in. As a whole, it was turning Harry increasingly *dark* -not in an evil way, but in a way that left many people seriously worried about him. Also, all the solutions they used so far to uncover the agent should have worked except they *didn't,* and no one could tell why not, not even Sherlock. And if Sherlock couldn't figure it out, who *could* !?

Hermione was trying very hard not to panic when Harry extricated himself from Seamus and Dean's conversation and came over.

"Sorry," he said gruffly.

Hermione stopped panicking and smiled sadly. It was a mixed blessing, Harry counting fights among the things he considered pointless. She couldn't wait until he felt safe enough to have long, drawn-out fights.

"So when are you leaving for London?" she asked.

"Friday evening after potions, probably by Floo; Hogwarts Express isn't going to run since there aren't as many students leaving Hogwarts."

Hermione's face fell. "So you can't join us for the Hogsmeade trip?"

"That should be okay. Good thing, too. I haven't done my Christmas shopping yet."

"What are you getting?"

"Sherlock sent me a wish-list," said Harry, taking it out. "He wants socks and pyjamas-the ugliest I can find."

Hermione didn't even blink at Sherlock's outré requests. She was actually expecting something weirder, like hair powder that let you grow your nose-hair into ringlets.

"I'm sure there's a clothes shop selling flashy wizardware," she said brightly.

Harry didn't smile back. "Yeah…"

"You two look cosy. Is there something we should know?"

It was Fred and George. They sat down at the table with Harry and Hermione as they both looked up.

"Harry, can we borrow Hedwig?" George asked.

"Sure, but why?" said Harry.

"George wants to invite her to the ball," said Fred sarcastically.

"We want to send a *letter*, why else would we want to borrow an owl?" said George.

"Why are you sending a letter?" asked Harry. "Who do you keep writing to, anyway?"

"Nose out, Harry, or I might stuff you in my trunk until Christmas," said Fred, waving his wand threateningly. "And no deductions either!"

"Wasn't even thinking it, but now that you've mentioned it…"

"Well, good luck figuring it out," said George, yawning. "Exploding

Snap?"

Hermione shook her head. George shrugged and took out a pack, as well as several desserts.

"Jam tart, Hermione?" said Fred.

Hermione looked doubtfully at the pastry he was offering her. Fred grinned.

"It's all right," he said. "I haven't done anything to them. It's the custard creams you've got to watch-"

Harry, who had just picked up a custard cream, quickly put it down. Fred laughed.

"Just my little joke, Harry…"

Hermione took the jam tart. Harry remained suspicious until he saw George nibble the end of a custard cream. Only then did he pick up the one he'd put down.

"Did you get these from the kitchen, Fred?" Hermione asked as Harry took a large bite.

"Yep," said Fred. "The elves are fine, by the way."

"All of them?" said Hermione casually.

"Yes, all of them, even the one you keep talking about," said Fred, grinning at her. He put on a high-pitched squeak and imitated a house-elf. " *'Winky is not drinking Butterbeer anymore! Winky is working very hard and teaching Treble the baby-elf every day* !'" he dropped the imitation. "See: they're fine when you leave them as they are!"

Hermione said nothing.

"So drop the idea of leading the house-elves out on strike," said George warningly. "You're just going to upset them and put them off their cooking!"

Just then, Harry caused a slight diversion by turning into a large canary.

"Oh sorry, Harry!" Fred shouted over all the laughter exploding around their vicinity. "I forgot- it *was* the custard creams we hexed-"

Within a minute, however, Harry had moulted, and once his feathers had fallen off, he reappeared looking entirely normal. He even joined in laughing.

" *Canary Creams* !" Fred shouted to the crowd. "George and I invented them- seven Sickles each, a bargain!"

Hermione fumed as a large mass of people eagerly gathered around Fred and George. There were days when the twins' pranks made her wanted to either box their ears or write to their mother. But then they were the only people capable of making of Harry laugh lately, so she didn't.

She just couldn't.

The Friday afternoon Harry and his friends visited Gladrags Wizardwear- where they had fun selecting the most lurid socks they could find, including a pair patterned with flashing gold and silver stars and another that screamed loudly when they became too smelly- John was puttering around 221B, putting up Christmas decorations with the help of Remus Lupin.

"I could conjure fairy lights," said Remus as he spellotaped Christmas lights to the mantelpiece.

"I'm not explaining to Mrs. Hudson why there are real fairies in the flat," said John.

"I thought she was going to her sister's?"

"She always says that, but in the end she never goes-thankfully."

"Why thankfully?" Remus asked.

John put on a straight face. "Just think about it: Mrs. Hudson leaving *Baker Street* ? England will fall!"

Everyone laughed except Sherlock, who was entertaining Benedict at the couch without much success.

"You can do it after she's done imbibing all the Christmas wine," said Sherlock after they finished laughing. "By the way, John, Mycroft is coming."

John looked at him for a moment.

"I thought he didn't do Christmas parties since they involve other human beings," John stated.

"Between managing a civil war and a Christmas party, he's choosing the lesser of two evils," Sherlock replied.

John's stare became pointed.

"Which is a Christmas party?"

"You know better than that, John."

John drew in a deep breath.

"He won't be here for the whole thing?"

"Certainly not, he'll find the prospect unbearable. The last hour of it at most."

John shrugged. "Okay."

"You know, I don't think I've ever seen Sherlock's brother," said Remus as John put boughs of fake holly around an ugly vase full of hot pink moss roses.

"Your life has been enriched a thousand fold because of it," Sherlock retorted.

Remus ignored him. "Sirius told me a little, and he sounds… very interesting."

"You think personifications of government are interesting?" said John mildly.

"It's not every day you even hear someone like that existing," said Remus, equally mildly.

John snorted.

"Well, apparently he's paying us a visit, so you can form your own opinions then. It shouldn't take you more than two minutes-Sirius currently holds the record of three seconds. Speaking of our pet dog, where is he?"

"He *said* he's off sending some owls to family," said Remus. "The not-jailed ones, mind you."

"He has some of those?"

"Oh yes. Molly and Sirius are cousins by marriage and Arthur's something like his second cousin once removed… He also has a first cousin, Andromeda, her Muggle-born husband Ted Tonks and their only daughter Nymphadora."

" *Nymphadora*," said John, wide-eyed. "Are you serious?"

"Unusual names run in his family," said Remus, chuckling. "And of course there's Lestrade, who is a cousin in more ways than one."

" *That*, I know," said John, grinning. "I also know Sirius has been threatening to call him Cousin Rogerius at the station and Greg is threatening to throw him in a holding cell if he dares."

"They're fighting already?" said Remus, laughing. "Anyway, Sirius said he wanted to get back in touch with everyone since Christmas is coming. He also mentioned something about meeting Muggle friends."

"Friends? *Plural* ?" said Sherlock, eyebrows raised.

Remus laughed again. "Actually, he didn't specify how many, so it might have been singular…"

As it happened, Sirius was on the *roof* of 221B Baker Street, showing Molly Hooper the enchanted greenhouse Sherlock bullied him into making. He grinned broadly as Molly ooh and ahed over the flowering lemon, lime and orange trees planted inside.

"It's so nice here. How did you manage it?" Molly asked as she smelled the blossoms.

"Trade secret," said Sirius, winking. "I might tell you later."

Molly grinned. "Do you always grow fruit trees around your flat?"

"No. His Highness Holmes suddenly developed an interest in beekeeping. Bees need a food source, so he decided to set up a citrus tree garden. Of course it was *my* job to do the actual planting."

"He made you garden?"

"Well, I am the slave…"

Molly made a funny expression, something between a giggle and a wince. Then she pointed at the large, unglazed flowerpot full of moss roses.

"They're so pretty. Are they for honey, too?"

"Actually, I don't know," said Sirius, scratching the back of his ear in a very dog-like fashion. "Sherlock said he wanted to make citrus blossom honey, but then he planted those roses himself. I have no idea why."

Molly gave him another funny look, this one containing something bittersweet.

"Maybe they're John's favourite flower."

Sirius shook his head. "I don't think so."

Molly blinked. "No?"

"I thought the same thing, so I asked, and John said she's a

barbarian when it comes to plants," said Sirius. "If they don't produce edibles, she's doesn't care either way about them."

Molly turned thoughtful. "Huh…"

They chatted a bit at the small wooden bench inside the greenhouse. Sirius appreciated the fact Molly wasn't one of those women who freaked out over bugs, especially when a large beetle that had strange markings around its eyes suddenly landed on her back. Molly was fascinated by the usual specimen, and went on at length about the different beetles she found inside cadavers. So Sirius stunned the beetle, put it in a large lidded glass jar with a couple of leaves and promised to hold onto it until she was ready to take the thing home. Sirius also added an Unbreakable Charm to the jar when Molly mentioned her cat Tobby had a tendency to pounce on bugs.

When time came for Molly to depart, Sirius invited her to the upcoming 221B Christmas Party.

"Who's going to be there?" Molly asked hesitantly.

"Lestrade and my extended family," said Sirius. "You should be fine, they're pretty harmless."

"… Sherlock?"

"He'll try to stay out for most of it. You know how he's like when he has to behave."

Molly briefly looked rueful and even pained. But then she started beaming again.

"Okay!"

Sirius returned to the flat after seeing her off, humming *Rest Ye Merry Hippogriffs* under his breath as he skipped up the stairs with the beetle jar tucked under his arm. The first person he encountered in the half-decorated living room was John Watson, who was polishing a gun.

"Date went well, thanks for asking," said Sirius.

"You're welcome," said John affably.

Sirius tried to exude a nonchalant air as John held the gun up and aimed at a wall.

"Do you know how much damage this thing can cause?" John asked at length.

"Enough to make a wizard refrain from using memory charms as if his life depended on it," Sirius replied.

"So we understand each other. That's good," said John. "So did you tell Molly about the Party's wizard theme?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good. Hopefully that'll be enough when Arthur inevitably loses his head over technology."

Harry travelled to London after having dinner at the Great Hall with his friends following their trip to Hogsmeade. Sirius and Remus greeted him at 221C's fireplace when he stumbled out of it. Remus still looked grey and sickly, but he didn't seem to have any trouble walking or standing either.

"How are you?" Harry asked.

"I'm on the mend," said Remus, smiling reassuringly. "I should be ready to teach by next term."

"Don't listen to him, he saying that because he's bored to his back teeth," said Sirius. "I'm going to break his legs if he dares to go back to work before February."

Harry went up to 221B afterwards. Sherlock, John and Benedict were at the sitting room table. Sherlock was examining a DNA profile, and John was nursing Benedict and dictating to a laptop at the same time. Harry wondered if he was witnessing new technology or something Miss Jackie made as he watched the laptop's keys press themselves.

"Magic done by Arthur," said Sherlock abruptly without looking up. "Adding dictation spells to a laptop are a simple matter once you make the electronic components magic-free."

Harry rolled his eyes. "You were spying me through the window, weren't you? *Creeper* ."

Sherlock smirked. John rolled her eyes as she beckoned Harry over. Harry approached eagerly, saying:

"I'm home."

"Welcome home," said John, smiling softly.

Harry slept well that night-the first time in weeks.

Despite the very heavy load of homework that the fourth years were given for the holidays, Harry was in no mood to work, thus spent the week leading up to Christmas doing nothing in particular when he wasn't joining Remus in his walks at Regent's Park (Sirius often pretending to be his pet dog), reading books that had nothing to do with school or magic, or rolling around the mat playing with Benedict, who was now big enough to wear clothes for nine-month-olds.

His friends at Hogwarts messaged him often during that time. Ron was the most frequent caller, for no other reason than that he still hadn't figured out who Hermione was going to the Ball with, thus kept trying to get Harry to help him figure out whom. After insisting he didn't want to speculate several times, Harry gave in and dropped a clue:

"She must have met him at the *library*," said Harry.

"The library," Ron repeated.

Harry nodded. "Where else could he have met her?"

Ron pulled a face. "Aren't you a helpful friend…"

In retaliation for not helping enough, Ron kept sending photos and videos of the interesting goings-on in Hogwarts just to make him feel jealous. Apparently the Canary Creams were a huge hit, because many of the videos Ron sent to him were of people suddenly bursting into feathers. George later confided to Harry in a text that the Gryffindors had learned to treat all food offered to them with great caution, in case there was a Canary Cream concealed in the centre, so he and Fred were working to develop something else. Harry made a mental note never to accept so much as a crisp from Fred and George in future.

Hermione and Julia sent him many messages, too. Predictably, Hermione asked him what Sherlock was doing and how far he was at finishing his homework. Julia preferred to send pictures and videos of Hogwarts's Christmas decorations. Harry had paid very little attention to what the Hogwarts staff was doing to the castle to impress their Durmstrang and Beauxbatons guests during the term because he was so busy, but now that he had time to look, he noticed the decorations were the most stunning he had yet seen. Everlasting icicles had been attached to the banisters of the marble staircase; the usual twelve Christmas trees in the Great Hall were bedecked with everything from luminous holly berries to real, hooting, golden owls, and the suits of armour had all been bewitched to sing carols whenever anyone passed them. It was quite something to hear " *O Come, All Ye Faithful* " sung by an empty helmet that only knew half the words. Then Julia sent a video that showed Filch extracting Peeves from inside the armour, where he had hid himself to fill in the gaps in the songs with lyrics of his own invention, all of which were very rude. Harry, John, Sirius and Remus shared a good laugh over that one.

"I wish I could go there," said John wistfully. "You should've stayed, Harry."

Harry shook his head. "I want to be *here* ."

And so the days went by. Then on Christmas Eve, Harry received a very odd phone call.

"Harry, do you remember the madman from February? You know the one who kept jumping from tower to tower with a long bow?"

Ron said in a rush.

"Err, yeah," said Harry, feeling bewildered.

"He's back! I saw him lurking in the Great Hall! And Harry, *you won't believe what he's wearing!* "

Harry felt torn. He knew exactly who Ron was talking about, and considering the man's track record, he knew his outfit would only make Harry want to look away fast before his eyes started to bleed. But then, like a horrible train wreck, Harry couldn't help but feel intensely curious as to how badly he dressed himself this time.

"Even Miss Jackie couldn't take it!" Ron went on. "She said his outfit was only acceptable twenty years ago in a country that really didn't deserve something like UFOs happening to them. Not sure what she meant by that but… Merlin, you have to see him, he's worse than even *Dobby* -"

"Don't show it to me," said Harry quickly. "Just… describe it."

"He's wearing fuzzy white overalls that have big green polka dots," said Ron. "They're *super* baggy. He only buckled one strap and it's on the wrong side. His shirt is turtleneck and rainbow."

Harry shuddered. "What else?"

"He has a bucket hat that matches his overalls and yellow fuzzy mittens. His shoes… ohmygosh, what the hell are his *shoes?!* They're sparkly and shiny and-"

"Okay, that's enough!" shouted Harry, unable to handle the mental images. "So why is he *there* ?"

"I don't know and I don't want to ask!"

Of course, Harry thought, as he hollered to John that Dr. Robert was back.

Around the same time in Hogwarts, Dr. Robert Ju was standing

before Ms. Jacqueline Shin, who had her face in her hands as though she was crying. The students still lingering in the Great Hall watched the scene breathlessly from a distance, wondering what was going on and what was going to happen next.

At length, Jacqueline lowered her hands, crossed her arms and glared at Robert dry-eyed.

"I believe I sent you an outfit, Robert," she said severely.

Robert started scratching his neck like a gorilla that ate far too much. "I thought it was for tomorrow."

Jacqueline looked like she wanted to stomp her foot. "There was a second package."

Robert blinked. "Uh… I didn't think to look for it, sorry."

Jacqueline let out muted *'augh!'* After mashing her fists against her forehead several times, she stomped her foot against the marble floor.

"Oh, I give up, it's too late now!" she cried. "Forget it, Robert, let's go. The damage is already done."

"Is it really that-"

"Robert," Jacqueline interrupted. " *Nothing you say about your clothes will ever make it okay* . Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now *move* ."

Robert grinned. He quickly drew a portal right beneath their feet, and in the next blink, they vanished.

Ron woke up late on Christmas Day, having stayed up watching Hermione and Ginny interrogate Julia about the madman they saw in the Great Hall yesterday (she refused to comment). He and

Neville talked about it later in their dormitory, and they agreed the madman *couldn't* be the person Miss Jackie was seeing, she was better than that.

Ron started unwrapping his presents after Seamus, Dean and Neville got up. He got a pair of violet socks and another maroon jumper from mum (just like the year before… and year before that…). The rest of his presents were more satisfactory with the exception of Mr. Jeremy's, which consisted of a suit made of shiny blue material, a black skinny tie and white shirt with a rounded collar. The ensemble was totally something Mr. Jeremy would wear, but Ron couldn't picture himself wearing them unless he absolutely had to. Hermione's gift was a vast box of Chocolate Frogs; Neville, another box of sweets, containing many of his favourites from Honeydukes; Julia, Victor Krum's autograph (how?!); and Harry, a Chudley Cannon hat.

Ron and Neville met up with Hermione and Ginny in the common room, and they went down to breakfast together. Julia had already finished eating her rabbit food by the time they got there.

"When did you get it?" asked Ron after thanking her for the autograph.

"Few weeks ago, at the *library*," said Julia, smiling crookedly like Miss Jackie.

They spent most of the morning in the Music Room, comparing and enjoying each other's presents, then returned to the Great Hall for a magnificent lunch, which included at least a hundred turkeys and Christmas puddings, and large piles of Cribbage's Wizarding Crackers.

They went out onto the grounds with Fred and George in the afternoon; the snow was untouched except for the deep channels made by the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students on their way up to the castle. Hermione chose to watch their snowball fight rather than join in, and at five o'clock she, Julia and Ginny said they were going back to the castle to get ready for the ball.

"What, you need three hours?" said Ron, looking at them

incredulously and paying for his lapse in concentration when a large snowball, thrown by George, hit him hard on the side of the head. "Who're you going with?" he yelled after Hermione, but she just waved and disappeared up the stone steps into the castle.

There was no Christmas tea today, as the ball included a feast. So at seven o'clock, when it had become hard to aim properly, the others abandoned their snowball fight and trooped back to the common room. The Fat Lady was sitting in her frame with her friend Violet from downstairs, both of them extremely tipsy, empty boxes of chocolate liqueurs littering the bottom of the picture.

"Lairy fights, that's the one!" she giggled when they gave the password, and she swung forward to let them inside.

Ron, Seamus, Dean, and Neville changed into their dress robes in their dormitory, all of them looking very self-conscious. Ron briefly considered wearing the dress robes his mum got for him just be polite, and ultimately decided Mr. Jeremy's shiny blue suit was the lesser of two evils considering Mum's robes were a maroon velvet abomination that had lace on the ruff and cuffs.

"Don't you look fancy," muttered Dean after he finished dressing.

"The Business Director of MMN occasionally needs to dress the part," said Ron gloomily as he tried to correct his tie.

The common room looked strange, full of people wearing different colours instead of the usual mass of black. Ginny was waiting for them at the foot of the stairs. She wasn't wearing the pink and orange farce Mum got for her, but elegant teal-coloured dress robes that had long sleeves overlaid with dark green lace and black crystal beads.

"You- *er* -look nice," Neville said awkwardly.

"Thanks," said Ginny, smiling.

"Where'd you get that?" Ron asked.

"I borrowed it from Julia," said Ginny, glaring. "Speaking of, she's going to meet us in the entrance hall."

"Fine," said Ron, looking around. "Where's Hermione?"

Ginny shrugged. "She went ahead. Anyway, shall we go?"

"Okay."

They left the common room and navigated through the crowded hallways. The entrance hall was packed with students too, all milling around waiting for eight o'clock, when the doors to the Great Hall would be thrown open. Those people who were meeting partners from different Houses were edging through the crowd trying to find one another. Ron surveyed the heads of the crowd, hoping to spot Hermione. Then he felt his sleeve tugged at, so he looked down instinctively.

A pretty girl wearing deep indigo dress robes and silver-and-pearl earrings was there. It took several seconds for Ron to recognise who she was, and when he did, his jaw dropped for a second.

"Hello," said Julia.

"Uh, hi," said Ron, marvelling at the difference the lack of glasses alone was making. He also wondered what Julia had done to her hair to make it curl in long shiny waves, because he was certain her normal hair was straight, dark and boring. "So have you seen Hermione?"

Julia put on a crooked smile.

"No."

A group of Slytherins came up the steps from their dungeon common room. Malfoy was in front; he was wearing dress robes of black velvet with a high collar, which in Ron's opinion made him look more of a ponce. Pansy Parkinson in very frilly robes of pale pink was clutching Malfoy's arm. Crabbe and Goyle were both wearing green; they resembled moss-coloured boulders, and neither of them, Ron was pleased to see, had managed to find a partner.

The oak front doors opened, and everyone turned to look as the Durmstrang students entered with Professor Karkaroff. Krum was at the front of the party, accompanied by a very pretty girl in periwinkle

blue dress robes Ron thought looked strangely familiar. Over their heads he saw that an area of lawn right in front of the castle had been transformed into a sort of grotto full of fairy lights-hundreds of fairies sitting in the rosebushes that had been conjured there, and fluttering over the statues of what seemed to be Father Christmas and his reindeer.

Then Professor McGonagall's voice called, "Champions over here, please!"

The crowd parted to let the champions through. Fleur Delacour and Roger Davies stationed themselves nearest the doors; Davies looked so stunned by his good fortune in having Fleur for a partner that he could hardly take his eyes off her. Cedric and a small pretty girl Ron assumed was Cho Chang stood next to the pair. His eyes then fell on the girl next to Krum, and Ron felt his jaw drop.

It was Hermione.

But she was a strange, cleaned up version Hermione. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and she was holding herself differently, somehow- or maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back.

She was also smiling.

That enraged Ron. How dare she smile and look like she was enjoying herself apart from her friends! Ron refused to look at her direction when the doors to the Great Hall opened to let in all the students, and just stomped right past her.

Ron barely noticed the Hall, which he vaguely noted looked very different. He saw the large round table at the top of the Hall, where the judges were sitting, and guessed that was where the Champions would sit. So he hurried over one of the round tables close by and secured a seat that would better let him spy on Krum-and Hermione. Julia followed, and sat next to him with a deep sigh.

Once everyone else was settled in the Hall, the doors opened again, and they saw Professor McGonagall-who was wearing dress robes of red tartan and had arranged a rather ugly wreath of thistles around the brim of her hat-standing before the threshold, the champions and their partners behind her in line. Everyone in the Great Hall applauded as they entered and started walking up towards the judges. Ron didn't clap, but watched Hermione with narrow eyes. She still looked happy and giddy. That infuriated him more.

Dumbledore smiled happily as the champions approached the top table, but Karkaroff wore an expression of barely concealed disapproval (which Ron approved of) as he watched Krum and Hermione draw nearer. Ludo Bagman, tonight in robes of bright purple with large yellow stars, was clapping as enthusiastically as any of the students; Madame Maxime, who had changed her usual uniform of black satin for a flowing gown of lavender silk, was applauding them politely; Mr. Crouch was clapping politely, too, and he didn't look enthused about the occasion-in fact, he looked slightly bored.

Ron looked down at the table when the champions and their partners sat down at the head table. There was no food as yet on the glittering golden plates, but small menus were lying in front of each of them. He picked up the menu and spied Dumbledore doing the same. Dumbledore studied his menu carefully, and then said very clearly to his plate, "Pork chops!"

And pork chops appeared. Getting the idea, everyone else placed their orders with their plates too. Ron was about to order steak-and-kidney pie when he noticed Hermione was deep in conversation with Krum-meaning Krum was talking *back*, and very enthusiastically at that. It was so indecent Ron forgot what he'd intended to order.

"Your lack of appetite worries me," said Julia over her plate of meatless Kedgeree.

When all the food had been consumed, Dumbledore stood up and asked the students to do the same. Then, with a wave of his wand, all the tables zoomed back along the walls leaving the floor clear, and then he conjured a raised platform into existence along the right

wall. A set of drums, several guitars, a lute, a cello, and some bagpipes were set upon it.

The Weird Sisters now trooped up onto the stage to wildly enthusiastic applause. The Champions and their partners headed over the dance floor as the Weird Sisters stuck up a mournful tune. More people joined the dance floor once the Champion pairs started dancing. Hermione looked like she was enjoying herself immensely as she danced with Krum. *Damn it.*

"Do you want to dance?" asked Julia.

"No," said Ron shortly.

"Okay," Julia sighed. Then she took out her phone and started texting.

Soon the dance floor was too full of people for Ron to properly spy on Hermione. He saw Neville and Ginny dancing - Ginny wincing frequently as Neville trod on her feet - and Dumbledore waltzing with Madame Maxime. He was so dwarfed by her that the top of his pointed hat barely tickled her chin; however, she moved very gracefully for a woman so large. He also saw Miss Jackie dancing with a strange man wearing an impeccable three piece suit of royal purple and sedate black tie. Ron assumed he was the man she was actually seeing.

"Aunt Jackie must've coordinated his outfit," said Julia wryly as she took a picture of the pair.

The Weird Sisters finished playing their first song, and applause filled the hall once more. Once the clapping stopped, the Weird Sisters struck up a new song. Ron narrowed his eyes when he finally caught the sight of Krum and Hermione. He followed their progress carefully, and while he was at it, he vaguely heard a boy from Beauxbatons ask Julia to dance.

"I assume you don't mind," Julia said as she went off.

Hermione came over and sat down in Julia's empty chair after the second song ended. She was a bit pink in the face from dancing.

"It's hot, isn't it?" said Hermione, fanning herself with her hand. "Viktor's just gone to get some drinks."

Ron gave her a withering look. " *Viktor* ? Hasn't he asked you to call him *Vicky* yet?"

Hermione looked at him in surprise- *surprise* !

"What's up with you?" she said.

"If you don't know," said Ron scathingly, "I'm not going to tell you."

Hermione stared at him.

"Ron, what-?"

But by this time Ron was almost blind with rage. He so angry he couldn't even sort through all the reasons why he was so angry at Hermione, so he reached for the first one he could think of.

"Krum's from *Durmstrang* !" Ron spat. "He's competing against Hogwarts! You- you're-" Ron casted around for words strong enough to describe Hermione's crime, "fraternizing with the enemy, that's what you're doing!"

Hermione's mouth fell open.

"Don't be so stupid!" she said after a moment. "The *enemy* ! Honestly - who was the one who was all excited when they saw him arrive? Who was the one who got so excited when he got his autograph for Christmas? Who's got a model of him up in their dormitory?"

Ron chose to ignore this. "I s'pose he asked you to come with him while you were both in the *library* ?"

"Yes, he did," said Hermione, the pink patches on her cheeks glowing more brightly. "So what?"

"What happened - trying to get him to join your House-elf liberation movement, were you?"

"No, I wasn't! If you really want to know, he- he said he'd been coming up to the library every day to try and talk to me, but he hadn't been able to pluck up the courage!"

Hermione said this very quickly, and blushed so deeply that she was the same colour as Parvati's robes. Ron didn't think he could get angrier, but he *did* .

"Yeah, well- that's his story," snarled Ron.

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"He's probably hoping you'll help him find out what his egg means! I suppose you've been putting your heads together during those cosy little library sessions-"

"I'd never help him work out that egg!" said Hermione, looking outraged. " *Never* ! How could you say something like that?! And why would he ask *me* for help, anyway?"

"All of the Champions know we're involved with the Tournament!" shouted Ron. "He probably thought you have insider information! How did this NOT occur to you, you're supposed to be *clever* ! Or maybe you *did* know, but you didn't mind sharing some pointers…"

Hermione looked as though Ron had slapped her. Ron refused to feel guilty about this.

"For your information," she said in a quivering voice. "He hasn't asked me one single thing about the tournament or the egg, not *one* -"

Ron didn't want to hear more excuses.

"Why don't you go and find Vicky, he'll be wondering where you are," he sneered.

" *Don't call him Vicky!* "

Hermione jumped to her feet and stormed off across the dance floor, disappearing into the crowd. Ron watched her go feeling a mixture of anger and satisfaction.

"That was nice of you," said Julia, who apparently returned.

Ron ignored her and continued to glare at the dance floor. There, Fred and Angelina were dancing so exuberantly that people around them were backing away in fear of injury. Professor Dumbledore was dancing with Professor Sprout, Ludo Bagman with Professor McGonagall; Madame Maxime and Hagrid were cutting a wide path around the dance floor as they waltzed through the students, and Karkaroff was nowhere to be seen.

"Vare is Herm-own-ninny?" said a voice.

Krum had just arrived at their table clutching two butterbeers.

"No idea," said Ron mulishly, looking up at him. "Lost her, have you?"

Krum turned surly.

"Veil, if you see her, tell her I haff drinks," he said, and he slouched off.

The song ended, everybody applauded once more, and Ludo Bagman kissed Professor McGonagall's hand and made his way back through the crowds, at which point Fred and George accosted him. Ludo Bagman shook off Fred and George fairly quickly, however, and sat back behind the top table next to Mr. Crouch, who hadn't left his seat all evening. Crouch didn't bother to turn and just drank deeply from his wineglass when Bagman started talking to him.

Julia was asked by another boy for the fourth song, and she went off again with him. Ron remained in his seat, watching Hermione dance. The sight made him want to kick something or upend the table, and yet he couldn't bring himself to look away either.

About half-way through the Ball, Julia suddenly came over and slapped the back of his head.

"What was that for?" asked Ron furiously.

"You wonder why," said Julia ironically. "Now listen, do you want to

make some people *really angry* ?"

Ron frowned. "What do you mean?"

Julia jerked her nose at a certain direction. There, Malfoy was dancing with a third year Slytherin girl. He threw a contemptuous look at Ron when he noticed him looking. Close by, at the Top Table, Hermione was talking animatedly with Krum.

"Alright, I'm in," Ron muttered furiously. "But how are we going to do it?"

"Just follow me," said Julia.

She took Ron by the hand and dragged him to a secluded spot close to the stage. There was an electronic music player connected to the speakers there. Julia quickly did something to it. Then she dragged Ron to the dance floor. Ron was about to ask how was dancing supposed to make either Malfoy or Hermione angry when the Weird Sisters left the stage for an intermission break. A disappointed murmur spread through the students as they wondered what was going to happen next.

"Honestly, do they think they can play live all night? Even the Weird Sisters need a break," Julia huffed.

"Why are we here, then?" asked Ron. "There isn't going to be more music, since-"

Just then, Ron heard Muggle music playing. It sounded very familiar. The song had an underlying clapping beat and the disembodied singer said that they were going to 'get funky' this time. As the song progressed, Ron suddenly realised where he heard the song from: it was the YouTube video Harry showed him once, where large groups of people from all around the world danced according to the black singer's directions.

Then the wall behind the stage showed the aforementioned YouTube video.

"You did not," Ron gasped as all the half-blood and Muggle-born students rushed back to the dance floor.

"Yes, I did," said Julia, smirking. "Shall we dance?"

Ron briefly spied Malfoy; he looked outraged.

" *Yeah*… !"

" *What is this* ?" growled Bartemius Crouch as he stared at the large body of students on the dance floor with an appalled look on his face. All of them were dancing enthusiastically according to the black Muggle singer's directions.

"Who cares?! It's looks really fun!" cried Ludo Bagman as he imitated the students.

"Dumbledore, what is this outrage?!" Crouch demanded furiously.

Dumbledore didn't reply; he was too busy laughing. His laughter only increased when the next music video played - it featured a stout oriental man doing a funny galloping dance with his wrists crossed. Unable to handle this anymore, Crouch stormed off, shattering his wineglass on the way.

"Oh, dear me," said Dumbledore as he watched Crouch leave.

Then, still chuckling, he quickly banished the shards with a flick of his wand.

Ron had to admit, the latter half of the Ball was lots of fun, especially when he noticed how angry Malfoy was. Clearly he couldn't stand what he was seeing. This made him determined to enjoy the dancing as much as possible, and soon he found himself actually enjoying the bouncing and twirling around. Julia was a fantastic partner for his cause. She actually knew how to dance, and refused all the dance offers from other boys so she could keep dancing with Ron. That pleased him a lot.

The Weird Sisters returned to the stage after the thirty minute intermission and continued to play until midnight. Everyone gave

them a last, loud round of applause and started to wend their way into the entrance hall. Ron and Julia joined the departing throng, and out in the entrance hall Ron saw Hermione saying good night to Krum before he went back to the Durmstrang ship. She gave Ron a very cold look and swept past him up the marble staircase without speaking.

Ron looked away, feeling furious again. He wanted to do something that would make Hermione *extra* -angry. He just couldn't think what.

"That was fun, wasn't it?" said Julia, patting her sweaty forehead with handkerchief.

"Yeah," said Ron. "Yeah, and your idea was brilliant."

Julia smiled crookedly. "Thank you."

"No really," said Ron, even as he wondered why he was saying this. "You really are brilliant. I reckon you're actually smarter than Hermione, you just don't show it."

"Liar."

"Nope, not lying," Ron lied. Then he took a moment to study Julia.

She was quite good-looking, Ron thought. She wasn't curvy like the way he liked girls, but the willowy look suited her. He also wasn't lying about her being brilliant, though he was hedging around the truth when he said she might be cleverer than Hermione… Alright, it was a downright lie, but she didn't need to know that. Anyway, Julia was definitely someone he could show off to other people, and feel absolutely proud to have as a dance partner or someone he-

Ron hesitated for a second. But then he thought about Hermione, and a reckless rage seized him. So he started to go ahead with his idea.

A feather-light touch of fingertips on his chest halted Ron in his tracks. Ron looked down and saw the hand keeping him at bay. The pressure was so light he could've gone ahead if he wanted to, and yet, Ron found himself unable to resist when Julia gently pushed him away.

A heavy silence hovered between them for several heartbeats. Ron felt himself turn red as time ticked by.

"Uh…" he stuttered.

"You're a good friend," said Julia quietly. "I want to keep it that way. So *no* ."

Ron was speechless.

They looked at each other silently for several more blinks. Then, with a swish of hair, Julia walked away.

Ron watched her go, and all he could think was: *Damn…*

Final Notes : Thus ends Yule Ball. *Finally* . I think this chapter tops all the others in terms of sheer ridiculousness. Sorry for the 2.5 week wait. I'm having a hard time finding the time to write lately. My June-July-August looks very packed. :(

In case you were wondering, Robert was wearing purple holographic high top sneakers that were two sizes too big.

Choices

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty One: Choices

Boxing Day morning, Severus went straight to the Headmaster's office after a meagre breakfast of toast and coffee. There he found Dumbledore sitting behind his desk and wearing a nightcap that had a ridiculous pompom dangling at the end.

"I see you've indulged in a bit of slumber," said Severus sardonically as he took a seat. "Perhaps you are getting on in years?"

"I have been since the day I was born," said Dumbledore as he stifled a yawn. "But never mind. There was something you wanted to tell me?"

Severus looked hard at Dumbledore with pursed lips. Then he looked up at the ceiling. It was far more difficult than he expected, the relaying of a vitally important piece of information he'd kept to himself for over a month…

Dumbledore remained silent while Severus composed himself.

"… It's coming back," he whispered, "The Dark Mark. Karkaroff's too- stronger and clearer than ever…"

" *Ah*," said Dumbledore quietly. "I was wondering when you would tell me this bit of information."

Severus snapped his eyes back to the headmaster.

"You *knew* ?"

"I had a strong suspicion," Dumbledore sighed, "So how long has this been going on?"

Severus wondered if he should ask Dumbledore how long he'd suspected the Dark Mark's return. Then he decided it didn't matter.

"… I first mistook it for a stubborn bruise, but then it took a distinct form two days before the first task of the Tournament."

"And it has steadily grown clearer since?"

"Yes."

Dumbledore hummed thoughtfully. For a while neither of them spoke.

"I suppose you want to know what I know," said Dumbledore.

"I *must*," said Severus harshly. "The Dark Lord may return. Karkaroff plans to flee if the Mark burns."

"And are you tempted to join him?"

Severus froze for a second. He didn't expect the question, to be honest, but the answer for it he already had.

"… No," he said. "I am not such a coward."

"No," agreed Dumbledore. "You are a braver man by far than Igor Karkaroff. You know, I sometimes think we Sort too soon…"

Severus didn't want to hear more on this.

"So what do you know?" he asked brusquely.

"A great deal, and yet, not enough," Dumbledore replied after

another sigh. "Now listen carefully, Severus. I do not wish you to be either misinformed or under-informed…"

Dumbledore then told Severus a lengthy summary: a wizard who once served in the Muggle armed forces and had worked for an infamous consulting criminal, the late Jim Moriarty, was now working for the Dark Lord, but he was not the main agent leading the efforts for his return; the agent was likely an old Death Eater, one who may have participated in an early resurrection attempt; the agent successfully infiltrated the ministry and the Triwizard tournament, and was attempting to kidnap Harry Potter (who else?) because the boy was somehow vital to the Dark Lord's return; the agent was using the Imperius Curse *and* the Polyjuice potion to replace one of the Ministry employees; various attempts had been made to uncover the agent, but so far the agent eluded capture…

" *Why haven't you told me these things earlier* ?" Severus practically shouted when Dumbledore finished speaking.

"Oh, Severus, would you have listened?" said Dumbledore chidingly. "You have exploded at any and all mention of Sherlock Holmes these last three months, and he features in every point of the narrative."

"You're slavishly reliant on that man," snapped Severus. "Just because he was right a few times before doesn't mean he's right *this* time!"

"Is this an objection made without any prior commit to reject them?" asked Dumbledore, eyebrow raised.

"You presume that I'm fault-finding!" Severus snarled. "Perhaps I have reason to have a different list of suspects since I am, unlike Holmes, actually *in* the Magic World and have personal experience dealing with the Dark Lord!"

"Who do you suspect, then?" asked Dumbledore calmly.

" *Rita Skeeter*," Severus spat. "You've read her recent articles, have you not?"

"I have. What is it about them that rouse your suspicion?"

"You've banned the woman from entering Hogwarts, and yet she was able to access the school enough to write those florid articles on Potter," said Severus. "Some of the details were the sort that require personal eyewitness. Recall how she waxed eloquent on how well he plays the violin."

Skeeter had made good of her promise to write more on 'The Secret Life of Harry Potter' (*Ha*). As expected, one had to have a heart of stone to not laugh at the melodramatic reporting of Potter's tragic life (Ha, again). But once you disregarded the purple prose, the articles had startlingly accurate details on Potter's daily routine. Some of the facts one may possibly glean from the other students, but the details about his music lessons were something only Ms. Shin would know, and she would never divulge the information to a *reporter*, least of all Skeeter.

"Just because Ms. Skeeter had gained access to Hogwarts doesn't mean she is working for Lord Voldemort," said Dumbledore calmly. "After all, she is quite resourceful and tenacious where her reporting is concerned… and her usual *modus operandi* is working alone unless she needs a photographer."

"She may not *know* she's working for him," Severus argued. "She is determined to write about Potter, and as you've said, she is the type that will let not something trivial like a ban stop her. All the Dark Lord has to do is let her do what she wants, and use her access when the time is right."

"It's possible," said Dumbledore, nodding. "However, if Ms. Skeeter is the unwitting agent, how did Voldemort know to use her? Skeeter started making her mark as the kind of reporter she is now after he was vanquished. Where and from whom, then, could he have got the necessary information?"

Severus was momentarily stumped.

"… Bertha Jorkins," he said, rallying. "There is hardly any Ministry worker who doesn't know Skeeter's poison pen. Skeeter also reported her disappearance in August. The article said Jorkins left to

visit her second cousin in *Albania* and never came back."

"And Albania is, incidentally, the last place Lord Voldemort is known to have been," said Dumbledore.

"Exactly . She could have met him or he could've found her; either way, as a ministry employee, Jorkins would've known about the Triwizard Tournament," said Severus. "It wouldn't have taken much to get her to *talk*, either. She was a pathological gossip when she was a student and I don't think she changed much since. No doubt the Dark Lord disposed of her once he gained all the information he could gain from her. Afterwards, it is only natural for the Dark Lord to check the news to see if the world at large noticed Bertha is missing. He would've learned Skeeter's name and reputation from the article."

"Again, very possible," said Dumbledore, smiling a little. "I thought of the possibility myself, so I relayed a few memories of Bertha as I remembered her as a student to Sherlock. He concluded after viewing them that she is the type to divulge the news of the Tournament easily. However, he and I are in agreement that this does NOT mean she was the one who told Voldemort about the tournament."

Severus frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Bertha, according to Bagman, has a memory like a leaky cauldron," Dumbledore explained. "This is not at all like the student I remember. She wasn't very prudent, perhaps, but there was nothing wrong with her *memory* . Exactly how is one to explain this change, I do not know, but it does strongly suggest we cannot draw inferences based on our old memory of Bertha. There is also a timing issue. Pettigrew escaped last year in *December*, with the help of an unknown assailant who attacked Bartemius Crouch. Bertha travelled to Albania this year in *July* . If indeed Lord Voldemort learned about the Triwizard Tournament through Bertha, why did he remain in Albania for so long? Could he not have travelled back to the UK long before that?"

"Why would he not stay?" Severus scoffed. "Pettigrew is a wanted man. Rather than travel with him-and he would have to-the Dark

Lord may have chosen to lie low in Albania until the manhunt for Pettigrew cooled down."

"But would he wait for six months?" asked Dumbledore. "Also, Pettigrew wasn't the only person who would've sought Voldemort out. In fact, the unknown assailant was likely zealous to find him. Would not Voldemort rely on this person rather than Peter? He is far more loyal and the ministry still doesn't know who he or she is."

Severus was at lost to explain that.

"But this explanation is better than the one Holmes is expounding!" said Severus stubbornly. "The purported connection between the agent and Barty Crouch is based more on conjecture than reasoning! Does he even have a *viable* suspect? None of the players convicted of trying to revive the Dark Lord previously are capable to carrying out the scheme-the Lestranges are still in Azkaban and Barty Crouch, Jr., as you well know, is *dead* !"

"Sherlock and Harry acknowledge the difficulties," said Dumbledore calmly. "That's why they are perusing new and rather intriguing venue of evidence."

Severus was curious despite of himself. "And they are?"

"Have you," said Dumbledore, leaning towards his desk and moustache quivering, "heard of the term *DNA* ?"

"No."

"It's a molecule that encodes the instructions on how a living organism work, form and function," said Dumbledore. "In simple laymen terms, our bodies know how to make blue eyes, black hair and so on because the instructions on how to make them are in the DNA. It is also the means by which we leave our unique traits to our descendants." The headmaster suddenly smiled as though in remembrance. "In the history of scientific discovery, it's a very recent one. I still remember the excitement over the discovery of the double helix structure of the DNA after James Watson and Francis Crick published their findings in 1953… Such is the advantages of reading Muggle Newspapers."

"Interesting, but why exactly is DNA significant to our current case?" interrupted Severus.

"The DNA profile of each individual is unique," Dumbledore explained. "The exception is identical twins, but I doubt the agent is part of one, considering how old he or she is. Anyway, the Muggle Law Enforcement uses the DNA in blood, semen, saliva and hair found in crime scenes to identify a matching DNA of an individual, such as the perpetuator. Muggles also use DNA to establish the *blood relationship* between different individuals."

Severus started to vaguely see the significance of this.

"More likely than not, Lord Voldemort's current agent would have strong blood ties to some of the oldest wizarding families," Dumbledore continued. "The people who are directly related to these families are quite small in number, thanks to the tradition of pure-bloods marrying fellow pure-bloods to maintain the so-called purity of blood. Also, as the Headmaster of Hogwarts, I have intimate knowledge of the family structure of the last four generations of pure-bloods. Find which family the agent is most closely related to, and we can find who the agent is."

"But you need a sample of the agent's DNA in order to establish a blood tie," said Severus. "How are you to obtain that if you don't know who the agent is pretending to be? Also, didn't you say the agent may be using the Polyjuice potion? The potion turns you into a different person at the deepest physical level possible. Wouldn't the DNA change also?"

"I'm glad you asked me that!" said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. "To answer your first objection, you must realise *who* the agent would want to replace are few. Also, *when* and *how long* the agent can use the Polyjuice potion is limited to the amount of potion he or she can brew. There is also the question of *where* it is appropriate to use the potion."

Severus thought about it for a moment.

"You need at least a mouthful of Polyjuice every hour to maintain the transformation," he said. "That means you would need a cauldron's

worth to stay transformed for a *day* . The ingredients are expensive and strictly regulated, the brewing period is a month long, and any contamination can result in hideous transformations that can take weeks to correct. Even if you correctly brew the potion, you need to accurately imitate the person you are replacing until it doesn't matter anymore. Thus, practically speaking, it's not a method one uses for an extended period of time."

"No. That's why Sherlock and I have concluded the agent is likely using the Imperius to maintain his or her cover on the day-to-day basis and is using the Polyjuice potion for operations that require a personal touch, namely the actual kidnapping of Harry."

"And you are certain the agent is merely trying to *kidnap* Potter, not do away with him."

"Yes," said Dumbledore firmly. "At the first task, the agent turned Harry's ministry-issued badge into a portkey. Fortunately, Harry removed the badge before it activated."

Severus felt cold. "So it's by pure dumb luck the plan was foiled."

"I wouldn't go that far," said Dumbledore. "There is a certain sense of hastiness bordering on carelessness in turning the badge into a portkey. After all, it's not that hard to imagine a badge hanging on one's neck to be cumbersome for someone flying on a broom. It is as though the agent was too *zealous* to get the task done. If I were to guess, I think the agent feels threatened by the military wizard who once worked for Jim Moriarty."

"That's pure speculation," Severus sneered. "Now I suppose you've collected multiple DNA samples of *all* the people who might have been replaced, in different settings and times."

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "I've also taken the liberty of obtaining hair samples of people closely related to known Death Eaters. Detective Chief Inspector Lestrade has incidentally told me he does not wish to ponder the depths of illegality of what we are doing."

"He is involved?" said Severus, frowning.

"Mr. Lestrade is very much aware his half-brothers Rodolphus and Rabastan will strongly object to his existence," said Dumbledore, "Then there is his functionally Muggle family to consider."

Severus tried to keep his face straight as he imagined Bellatrix Lestrange's reaction to learning about Mr. Lestrade. Oh, to be a bat on the ceiling when it happened…

"Thus he is eager to lend a helping hand," said Dumbledore, moustache quivering.

"Who else is aware of the situation?" asked Severus.

"Sirius and Remus, of course," Dumbledore answered. "There are also Mr. Lestrade's in-laws…"

Severus wet his lips as he remembered *who* Mr. Lestrade had for an in-law.

"So he's helping us this time?"

"He promised his full support."

"What brought the change of heart?"

"His heart has not changed," said Dumbledore solemnly. "He is, however, far more *informed* ."

Severus frowned again. "I don't follow you."

"It may come to you as a surprise, Severus, but there was a time when old men such and he and I were young and, frankly, didn't know any better," said Dumbledore, smiling sadly. "June Hu also had the disadvantage of being foreign. I don't think wizards and witches born and raised in Europe and America understand how unusual our world is. June Hu lived without the concept of a separate magic world for most of his life. Even to this day his native country does not separate magic and muggle, and the magic people dwell among the 'ordinary' people."

Severus began to understand.

"Are you saying he didn't participate in the war against the Dark Lord because he wasn't part of the wizarding world back then?"

"Correct," said Dumbledore. "He knew we existed, and was rather surprised at our sheer numbers, but since the way we practiced magic was at odds with his way, he kept himself as hidden as possible to avoid conflict. We would've never heard of him, I am sure, if his wife was never kidnapped."

" *1962*," Severus breathed.

"The one and only," said Dumbledore softly. "I never had the privilege of meeting his first wife Huang Yue Ying, Severus, but all accounts point her to being a lively person who was eager to learn and make new friends. My guess is she astonished our kind with her unusual way of magic, and the news of her existence eventually reached Lord Voldemort." He paused. "The first time I met June Hu was after the incident. His first direct encounter with our kind being as it were, I was unsurprised when he declared he wanted nothing to do with us. I managed to keep an open channel by offering to teach him *our* way of magic, so that he would know what to expect from then on."

"So the distance education wasn't his idea, it was *yours*," said Severus. "I also thought he developed the magic removal curse when he worked at the Ministry. So it actually *predates* even his Hogwarts education?"

"Yes, for both questions," Dumbledore replied. "I learned after he finished his first year of independent study that he was hailed a prodigy in his motherland. Of course, by then, I could draw the inference without any assistance…"

Severus nodded slowly.

"I suppose he still had no good feelings for our world by the time he finished his education in wizardry and witchcraft."

"He cut all contact," confirmed Dumbledore. "He only started to slowly engage with our world when his daughters were born and later received Hogwarts letters. You know the rest."

Severus nodded again.

"What about my second objection?"

"I know *one* individual discovered an Animagus still retains his original human DNA even when he is in his animal state," said Dumbledore, his blue eyes twinkling again. "But the polyjuice potion may be different. We could test it, of course, but there are more parameters to consider. For example, we do not know what happens to the strand of hair that parted company with its owner's body. Even if the hair remains in its transformed state so long as the potion is still in effect, the profile is worthless if the owner's body returned to its original state while it was being generated. But it does not hurt to find out. We do have the luxury of time, since it is unlikely the agent will strike again until the Second Task."

Severus had a terrible feeling about this. "How exactly are you going to 'find out'?"

"Can you not imagine?"

Unfortunately, Severus could. " *No* . I *refuse* ."

"Do you think a man like Sherlock Holmes would let your lack of cooperation stop him from discovering the truth?" asked Dumbledore mildly. "Also, think of what he would do as alternatives."

The alternative made Severus's blood run cold. " *You're out of your mind if you allow it* !" he bellowed.

"Regardless of my permission or how exactly Sherlock decides to perform the experiment, Harry *will* get involved," Dumbledore pointed out.

I hate you, Severus didn't say as he quietly fumed.

"You need to work with him, Severus," said Dumbledore solemnly. "Should the unthinkable happen, we will not be able to hide the fallout. Not this time. Not when almost every Muggle in the UK is equipped with a smartphone and camera that lets them record and post videos on the internet in matter of minutes. We *need* Muggle cooperation, and Sherlock Holmes is, strangely enough, the best

person who can help us. Also, like it or not, he is Harry's *father* ."

"So Holmes actually cares about *him* ?" Severus spat. "I thought he didn't have the capacity to care."

"Caring is not his greatest strength," agreed Dumbledore. "But do you doubt he cares about John Watson?"

Severus went still.

"On that matter, do you doubt John cares about the boy?"

Severus continued to remain silent.

"Think carefully what John Watson would do before you make any decisions," said Dumbledore in conclusion.

Harry returned to Hogwarts the day before Christmas holidays were over. Hermione thought he looked quietly determined as he went around and greeted everyone except Ginny, who wasn't in the Gryffindor common room.

"Where is she?" Harry asked.

"She's, um, out seeing Michael Corner from Ravenclaw," said Hermione carefully, gauging his reaction.

Harry frowned and Ron looked startled.

" *Why* ?" Ron blurted.

"He asked her out after the Yule Ball," Hermione answered. "She agreed to try it out."

Ron gaped like a stranded fish. Harry's frown increased. Hermione wasn't sure what the latter meant. Did Ginny seeing another boy bother him? If so why? Was it unconscious jealousy? Was she correct, after all?

Ever since Harry made it clear he had no thought to spare except for

those dedicated to foiling You-Know-Who, Ginny confessed-very dejectedly-that she should stop harbouring the hope he'd notice her any time soon. Hermione agreed and told Ginny to get on with life, maybe go out with other boys so she could be more like herself. Julia agreed on the get on with life part, but didn't see why that meant Ginny should see other boys. Moreover, Julia argued, if the person Ginny ultimately wanted to be with was Harry, what was the point of seeing other boys? Hermione and Julia had a long argument over the issue. Then Michael Corner came along, Ginny made her choice, and that was that.

"… She decided to start seeing someone when we're not done with the case?" said Harry at length.

Hermione felt herself slumping. Of course Harry would stay single-minded.

"Don't worry, Harry, she's not the type to vanish just because she's seeing someone," Hermione sighed.

"But…"

"Oh, Harry, what's it to you if she is?" said Hermione testily. "You don't know if it's going to be too much of a distraction. Besides, she's free to see who she wants, it's not like *you* were seeing *her*, is it?"

Harry scowled.

" *Fine*, whatever," he said, turning away. "You update her later if you want to. I'm not doing it."

Hermione felt furious. "So you're going to cut her off just like that?"

"Who said anything about me cutting her off? I'm not the one absent," snapped Harry. "Now do you want to know the latest or should I just keep it all to myself?"

Hermione reluctantly dropped the issue.

The four of them quickly moved to the Music Room, where Julia was already waiting for them inside a drawn noise-cancelling screen.

Harry seemed to notice the strange, awkward air between her and Ron, which had been hovering between the two since the Yule Ball, but didn't comment on it.

"I'll show you my memory of what Sherlock told me," Harry started as he dug out his memory harvesting charm from out from his inner jacket pocket. "Maybe it *is* best Ginny isn't here. We can't tell her anything about the memory harvesting spell, after all. Oh, and before we watch, you should have this."

Harry handed out to everyone a paper charm. All of them had elabourate Chinese calligraphy written in rusty-brown ink. Hermione suppressed a shiver as she wondered if they were all written in blood.

"What is this?" asked Ron.

"Something that stops people from eavesdropping into your brain," Harry explained. "It's just a precaution," he added when Neville and Ron sputtered. "Not many wizards and witches are capable of doing it, and eye-contact is crucial in order to do it, but you never know."

Once everyone got a paper charm that blocked mind-intrusion, Harry placed his memory harvesting paper charm on his phone. Immediately the holographic image of Sherlock sitting on a leather-upholstered chair with his knees drawn to his chest and his hands clasped together under his chin projected out of from the phone.

"… You recall there is evidence that the agent was present at the First Task, but the map appeared not to reveal his name," said the holographic Sherlock. "That in itself is an important *clue* ."

" *How* ?" said Hermione, Ron and Neville all at once, though there was no way the holographic Sherlock could hear them.

"How can you have the appearance of a different person, and avoid the detection a map that reveals your true name?" Sherlock went on.

All three drew a blank for several seconds. Harry looked at them with a grim smile on his lips.

" *Replace a person who has the same name as you*," he answered in sync with the memory-Sherlock.

Hermione's eyes went wide.

"Oh, *oooh*… !" she stuttered, as everything slowly came together, but then not quite.

"Remember," Sherlock intoned, "that four people were convicted of trying to resurrect LV shortly after his fall: The Lestrange brothers, the elder Lestrange's wife, and Bartemius Crouch's son. This son, incidentally, shares the same name as his father: Bartemius Crouch, *Jr* ."

Now Julia, Ron and Neville's jaws were hanging open.

"And… and *Barty Crouch* is one of the people we think the agent replaced!" Neville squeaked.

"He also sacked Winky!" said Ron in rush. "What if… what if the second person in his house at Christmas was his *son?* What if it was Winky's job to take care of his son and keep him hidden? *What if this son was right there to listen when Grandmaster Shin told Crouch about Pettigrew* ?"

"Then of course Crouch would sack her," said Julia breathlessly. "She failed to do her job."

"But… why would the son be in his house?" sputtered Hermione. "He's supposed to be *dead* ! How did he escape from Azkaban? He wasn't an animagus, was he?"

"Sirius said Crouch and his wife were allowed a deathbed visit," said Sherlock. "Dementors are blind. They sensed one healthy person and one sickly person entering, and one healthy person and one sickly person leaving. Of the three players of the visit, two of them were sickly to the point of death. So who is to say which of the two had actually left? Also, would it surprise you if a deeply loving mother decided to switch places with her son, and was careful to take a potion that lets her assume the appearance of said son to the day she died?"

The five of them were speechless.

"But this is just a *theory*," said Sherlock, turning very serious. "There are certainly a lot of strongly suggestive clues that support it *:* Besides all that we know so far, Ellen has told me that she overhead Winky teaching Treble that a House-elf must always keep her master's secrets. Ellen had the foresight to ask her further questions about it, and Winky confirmed that she had been entrusted with her master's deepest *secret*, singular, which of course she cannot reveal. That this secret is Crouch smuggling his son out of prison is an attractive idea, but it is not a necessary inference. Crouch doesn't seem the type to do such extra-judicial acts, even for the sake of his dying wife, but one never knows. In short, *we still do not have clinching evidence* ."

The five of them nodded.

"So we are back where I've left you," said Sherlock, looking stern. "We *must* find out if the polyjuice potion changes a person's DNA profile after consumption. If it turns out it does not, then we will collect a sample of whoever shows up as 'Bartemius Crouch' on the map during the second task - and by ' *we'* I don't mean *you,* Harry. No, don't give me that look. The agent is tasked to kidnap *you*, so you approaching him would be the height of stupidity. Leave the task to Dumbledore. If it turns out the potion does change your DNA profile, then we will exhume the body buried as Barty Crouch, Jr. Either way, believe you me, if you try to approach the agent, I will have your hide."

Harry turned off his phone.

"That was Sherlock's Christmas present for me," Harry said. "Usually he keeps the solution to himself to the very end, and he didn't have to tell me all this, but… "

"He told you anyway since you needed to know," said Hermione quietly.

"Yeah," said Harry, blinking rapidly. "Anyway, the polyjuice potion- John vetoed us brewing it on our own. I mean, what if the potion gets contaminated and we drink it without knowing?"

"I can see that," said Julia "Like, if a fly drowns in the potion, we might turn into a fly abomination."

"Exactly," said Harry while Neville, Ron and Hermione winced, "So no brewing the potion without supervision."

"But who's going to supervise?" said Ron. "I don't fancy asking Snape."

"There's Professor Moody," said Hermione.

"Do you really want to ask him? He might jinx us all and then tow us to the Magical Law Enforcement just to make sure we're not up to something. Remember what he said he did to the witch who said 'Boo' behind his back."

"Sherlock already arranged everything," said Harry. "He should be here now. Let's go."

They left the screen.

Everyone was struck silent as they caught sight of a very familiar looking man wearing the shiniest suit Hermione had ever laid her eyes on-it was if he'd made it with aluminium foil. He was also wearing a white-and-purple diamond patterned shirt and a horrible tie that looked like the Atlantic Ocean had mated with bright orange fabric.

"Everyone, meet Dr. Robert Dongyi Ju," said Harry. "He's a genius healer. He's also a bit mad."

"Only a bit, that was nice of you," said the man, grinning goofily and waving. "Hi, I'm Robert."

Hermione considered running away, and saw corresponding emotions on Ron and Neville. Julia just covered her face behind a hand.

"Of course it's you."

Final Notes : Snape returns! I missed writing from his POV. ASIM! GOF is at its last stretch, readers!

I wrote down this long philosophical dialogue for Sherlock on whether DNA would stay even after Animagus transformation or polyjuice, but then Harry reacted with "You lost me completely," so I scraped it. Maybe later.

A Quiet Convergence

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Two: A Quiet Convergence

Everyone unfamiliar with Robert Dongyi Ju MD eventually got over the pain of seeing him close-up. Once they did so, Dr. Robert went straight to the business of brewing the Polyjuice potion.

"It's a Class A banned potion in most Magical States of America-definitely the DMV area, which is where I live," Dr. Robert explained. "Making it and distributing it as illegal as distributing cocaine. So I'm shocked students in the UK learn how to brew it at *school* ."

"Only if you take N.E.W.T. Potions," said Hermione. "And do you mean you've *never* brewed the potion before?"

"Nope," said Dr. Robert. "And I wasn't planning on ever brewing it, until this came up."

Hermione bit her lip.

"Isn't it hypocritical of you to wonder if I'm qualified to brew it when you were ready to brew it on your own?" said Dr. Robert offhandedly as he pulled out a printout. "Now relax," he added when Hermione turned bright red. "The first stage of Polyjuice potion brewing creates an elixir called *Primum ens Melissae*, which I have brewed many

times. The whole potion isn't that difficult to brew, really-it just takes a long time. The brewing time is one of the main reasons why it's not as abused as it could be, really…"

"How long are we talking about?" Ron asked.

"Twenty-two days is the official minimum, since the standard recipe calls for lacewings to be stewed for twenty-one days and then let the potion stew for another eighteen hours after all the ingredients are in, assuming you're brewing it in a Copper Cauldron," muttered Dr. Robert as he read the recipe.

"But the fluxweed has got to be picked at the full moon!" protested Hermione as she read the notes herself. "Doesn't that mean it'll be ready in about a month?"

"A month?" said Ron. "That's barely enough time to be ready before the Second Task!"

Dr. Robert frowned at the recipe while Hermione glared at Ron, who withered. Then, abruptly, Dr. Robert crumpled the printout into a ball and threw it over his head.

"You know what, forget it, this is insane," he said.

Hermione turned shocked. "But… !"

"No one wants to brew a potion for month," Dr. Robert declared. "With a bit of know-how and careful thinking, we should be able to brew Polyjuice in eleven days."

This time Hermione stared with a different kind of shock, and so did everyone else. Unconcerned of his audience, as he often was, Dr. Robert clasped his hands together briefly, stuck out a few fingers in a weird contorted way, unclasped his hands and a wheeled blackboard burst out between his palms.

"That was wandless magic!" Hermione whispered. "I thought only Grandmaster Shin could do it!"

"Hand Seal (手印) based magic, actually," said Julia. "He did the Im (임[臨]) sign."

Hermione's eyes went wider. "Is this something your grandfather taught you?"

Julia shook her head. "Nah, something I read when I snuck into his office before he chased me out."

"Should I have a word with your grandfather?" said Dr. Robert as he wrote on the board by hand. "It sounds like he doesn't want to teach you."

"Mmm, no," said Julia as she fiddled with a robe sleeve. "He does teach me stuff, but I think he's worried I might turn out just like my mum so he keeps the more dangerous things to himself."

"I'll definitely have a word with him, then," said Dr. Robert as he finished scribbling. " *There*, take a look."

He stepped aside. On the board was the Polyjuice potion's recipe written in an abbreviated way; each step only listed the key ingredient, required action if any and the temperature (left blank). Below the recipe was a table that had categories vessel, ingredients, temperature and time in the header, and blank boxes on the row beneath that.

"Four things are vital in creating a potion," Dr. Robert began, "Vessel, ingredients, temperature and time. Mess up any one of these things, and you get a bad potion. That said: let's first consider what kind of vessel we want to use to brew the polyjuice potion."

"You mean Copper verse Brass verse Copper?" said Hermione.

"No," said Dr. Robert. "You're assuming we'll use a *Cauldron* . We don't have to. You can brew a potion in a stock pot," he conjured an aluminium one, "a Dutch oven," he pulled out a blue tinted enamel one from thin air, "or a cast-iron skillet." He hefted a thick nine inch one. "Remember, a Cauldron is a *vessel* . The purpose of a vessel is holding stuff and distributing heat to the contents. If you have another type of vessel that does a better job, why bother?

"Now if you look at this recipe, you'll notice at no point are we supposed to bring it to a boil," Dr. Robert continued. "Usually-but not

always-this means the potion requires long and slow brewing at a low temperature. So the question is: at *what* temperature are we supposed to maintain the potion? Does it have to be exact? Is simmering enough? Are we supposed to think more on the lines of poaching? What?"

Harry could see the new-found attentiveness in his friends at this point. Hermione actually took out a sheet of parchment and started taking notes.

"Unfortunately, this recipe doesn't tell you these details," said Dr. Robert as he tapped the end of an extendable fork on the blackboard. "The hints we have are steps four and seven of stage one and step seven of stage two: brew eighty minutes for a Pewter Cauldron; a Brass Cauldron will only require sixty-eight, and a copper one only sixty; then reheat after putting in the leeches and two scoops of lacewing flies. This strongly suggests the potion needs to stay at a certain temperature, since different metals conduct heat differently. *But* . All cauldrons are different, even if they're made of the same material and subjected to the same manufacturing regulations. The season, temperature of the room, and how high above sea level you are at will influence how quickly the potion temperature rises, too. You also need to think about the *size* of a cauldron and the amount of potion you're making-larger mass requires more heat-but the recipe doesn't tell you what size Cauldron you're supposed to use, or whether or not you can double the recipe. Either way, rather than relying on estimates and predictions that may not be accurate, we should use a thermometer."

Everyone nodded except Neville, who didn't know what a thermometer was.

"I've already figured out the potion needs to stay at XXX degrees Fahrenheit-or XX Celsius, for you metric folk," said Dr. Robert. "Now thermometers: You can't just use anything. Mercury models are risky to handle. Alcohol based ones are notoriously inaccurate. There are electric probe models, and that's the type I recommend for their versatility and accuracy. Of course, if you want to go *really* Muggle, there's infrared."

Dr. Robert took out a white device that looked like a white barcode scanner and waved it around. A red laser light danced at the end of the nozzle accordingly.

"Now let's talk about heat control," said Dr. Robert after he put his infrared thermometer away. "For most potions, you can use an open fire. But this potion requires you to maintain a constant low temperature for days. That's hard to do with the typical setting of a cauldron on top of an open fire. Flames are inconsistent; water evaporates into the air, so you have to add more water ever so often and that drops the temperature; and you have to watch for boil-overs. I don't know about you, but that's way too much work for me."

Harry and Ron nodded fervently.

"That's why I chose," said Dr. Robert, grinning, "an electric skillet."

He waved a hand at the electric skillet that was standing on top of a nearby table.

"Note the temperature control setting," said Dr. Robert, pointing at the nob. "It will let us keep the potion at the desired temperature. Also note the heavy body, which helps even heat distribution." He gestured at the body, which was made of metal. "There's also a lid, so that reduces moisture loss due to evaporation." Dr. Robert clamped the lid on. "It's also a Muggle device, so when your muggle neighbours come over to visit, there is no danger of them going: D00de! Is that a *Cauldron* ? Why you have a Cauldron in your house?!"

Hermione and Julia giggled, and Harry, Ron and Neville laughed.

"Okay, so now we have the vessel and temperature figured out," said Dr. Robert as he jotted them down on the board. "Let's talk ingredients, shall we?"

Dr. Robert proceeded to explain the magical contribution each of the ingredients gave to the Polyjuice potion, why they were entered in the order listed in the recipe, and what one may use as substitutes (Boomslang skin could be substituted with other types of shed snake skin; horn of bicorn, on the other hand, was one of the few

substances that had the necessary magic to fuse two different beings, thus couldn't be). He also told them *Primum ens Melissae*, the elixir that formed before one added the powdered horn of bicorn, served as the base of many healing potions, including (but not limited to), the blood-replenishing potion, Skele-Grow and the Limb Attachment salve.

"Now all we have to think about is time," said Dr. Robert after he'd finished explaining. "As you've noted before, the fluxweeds needs to be picked during the full moon. The potion itself needs to sit for twenty-one days. If you did the later for cooking, all the ingredients would've disintegrated to mush. This means the magical property of the *number* involved is important. You may have noticed there are a lot of threes in the recipe."

"Three symbolizes balance, stability and unity," gasped Hermione.

"Twenty-one is three multiplied by seven," Julia added. "Seven means completeness and rest."

"Glad you brought up number twenty-one," said Dr. Robert, nodding. "The recipe calls for twenty-one days of stewing. Why days? If what you care about is the number, then the unit of time doesn't matter. So if you really want to, you can just let the potion sit for twenty-one hours. But magic increases in potency the longer it ferments, as it were, so thinking in terms of days instead of hours makes sense. *But*, are we really getting the kind of magic we need for the potion from the number twenty-one? Do we *have* to use number twenty-one?"

No one answered, not even Hermione.

"Bluntly put: no," said Dr. Robert. "Remember, Potions are essentially *soup* . So it's not as exacting as, say, making nitroglycerin." He looked at Ron and Neville's confused faces and said, "It's something dangerous and complicated. Just take my word for it, okay?"

"So when you said we can make the potion in eleven days, it's because we can use three plus seven instead of three times seven," said Julia thoughtfully.

"The smaller number won't make the potion weaker?" asked Harry.

"No, it's actually the opposite," said Hermione promptly. "Mixing too many numbers together often dilutes the magical properties of the resulting number. That's why most don't go over the number thirty. The number ten has its own magical properties, too. Since they include 'completion' and 'transition', it would only help the potion."

"Huh…" said Harry.

"Shouldn't you follow the recipe regardless?" asked Julia. "I doubt the agent thought to improve the existing recipe and even if he did, I don't think You-Know-Who would've let him mess around."

"If this was a chemical experiment, I would've followed the published recipe to the letter," said Dr. Robert. "But the whole point of brewing the Polyjuice potion is figuring out whether or not its transforming powers affect your DNA profile. We're also dealing with *soup*, not a bomb. Unlike a bomb, you can change a recipe and still get the same results. Potioneers do it all the time."

Dr. Robert wrote down 'ten days' on the board for the category 'Time'. Then he crossed off the '21' listed for the last step of stage one and wrote '10' on top of it.

"I think that covers the Polyjuice potion," said Dr. Robert, "Any questions?"

Julia raised her hand.

"How do you make the blood-replenishing potion from *Primum ens Melissae* ?"

"You add whole heliotrope and let it stew for a day," Dr. Robert replied.

"What would happen if you, um, added shredded boomslang skin and heliotrope?" Julia asked again.

"Why are you asking me this?" asked Dr. Robert, staring unblinkingly.

Julia looked down. Then she hardened her expression and looked up.

"Say there's someone who is… has a curse that infects even your magic. Since magic is in the blood, won't the curse go away, at least temporarily, if you transform the blood into that of someone who doesn't have the curse?"

A hush fell in the room. It wasn't hard to guess *which* curse Julia had in mind. Harry quietly marvelled at the fact she was still thinking about werewolf treatments, even after all this time and after all that was going on. Then he observed Dr. Robert's intensely intrigued expression and felt his stomach do a giddy jump.

"You want to limit the polyjuice potion's transformative effects to just the blood," said Dr. Robert.

Julia nodded.

"The reasoning being, since the curse is in the blood, if the blood changes, the curse may be no more."

Julia nodded again.

"You can't take the effects of one potion and limit it to the scope of another potion, even if they have the same base," said Dr. Robert. "You're still blending two potions together. Golpalott's Second Law states a blend of different potions has more effects than the sum of its parts. What you want to do is the opposite."

"So you'll have to make a different kind of potion altogether," said Julia, crestfallen.

"Yes," said Dr. Robert, eyes twinkling. "But the purpose of the potion-changing the nature of a person's blood, therefore magic-can be achieved without a potion."

Everyone stared at Dr. Robert.

"When a wizard or witch gives their blood to someone else, he or she gives their *Life* to the recipient," he said. "Now, when you receive Life from another, the donor's magic imputes itself to your

magic."

Harry saw the mystery unravelling before his eyes instantly.

"Therefore, if a wizard who doesn't have the curse gives his blood to someone who *does* have the curse, the former's magic might overwrite it!" said Harry breathlessly. "So the cure for lycanthropy is-"

"-Blood transfusion," said Dr. Robert. Then he beamed proudly at Julia, "Girl, you da *bomb* ."

Julia just gaped at the floor, looking absolutely stunned, while everyone else cheered.

Dumbledore and Mr. Shin were silently regarding a gold ring inset with a black stone cracked in the middle when a rip appeared inside the headmaster's office. A second later, a young man burst out from the slit.

"HELLOoooo! I have good news and better news annnnd… not-so-good news," said Robert, shouting and waving his arms at first, but quickly shrivelling and quieting down when Shin levelled a glare at him. "Uh, should I come later?"

"Oh no, do tell us now," said Dumbledore pleasantly. "I have a feeling you have very good news indeed."

Robert blinked a few times at Dumbledore before resuming his enthusiasm.

"Good news: I can have the Polyjuice ready in eleven days," said Robert brightly. "Better News: Mr. Shin's granddaughter got a brainwave on a werewolf cure. It's *really* promising. I contacted the Magical Institute of Health and they want to try it out ASAP."

Shin blinked. "… What?"

"This is wonderful news!" Dumbledore cried. "Do you mind if I relayed it to some of my werewolf contacts?"

"Oh, go ahead, if you think it's wise," said Robert as he bounced on the balls of his feet. "I'm about 95% sure it will work, but you never know. Anyway, gotta dash. Mr. Shin, I think you should rethink your stance on teaching your granddaughter. She's more than able to handle all the material."

And with that, Robert jumped back into the rip.

"So you *have* been teaching her," said Dumbledore. "I wondered when Minerva told me about the paper charm."

"She's a voracious learner," Shin sighed. "She badgered me for *weeks* when she discovered her magic."

"She has your tenacity and thirst for knowledge, I see."

Shin shook his head.

"Her hunger for knowledge probably comes from Yue Ying. As for the tenacity, that's all her father. Greg is not the brightest, but what he does not have in raw talent, he makes up by sheer hard work. That is how he managed to rise up through the ranks."

Dumbledore smiled.

"Indeed. Now, I wonder what Robert meant by not-so-good news."

"Your hand perhaps?" said Shin, as he glanced at Dumbledore's right hand, which was red and raw, as though burned. "He may have even noticed the ring for what is it."

"Quite possible," said Dumbledore.

The two old men sat in silence for a beat.

"Forgive me, I couldn't think of a better way to get the ring away from you," muttered Shin.

"There is nothing to apologise for. The ring had a terrible curse upon it. Had you not acted quickly as you had, even if I survived the initial contact my days would've been numbered."

"And what a disaster would that be," said Shin dryly.

There was another bout of silence.

"You will not ask why I so recklessly tried to put on the ring?" asked Dumbledore.

Shin shook his head.

"You have your secret hurts, and I have mine," he said. Then he noticed Dumbledore's watery eyes and scowled. "Oh, stop crying like a baby."

As far as Neville was concerned, the weeks following Christmas holidays were the *Best* . It felt like waking up from a long nightmare to a bright sunny morning.

The Polyjuice potion got brewed without any hiccups. The brewing had the additional benefit of having Dr. Robert around. Learning Potions from the doctor was certainly easier on the nerves, though his outfits had a tendency to make Neville's eyes throb in revolt. Harry in particular was thriving under his tutelage. As he rightly put it, Dr. Robert had the ability to make Potions make sense.

Dr. Robert's outfits eventually ceased to be a problem when Miss Jackie, who oversaw the potion when Neville and his friends weren't present, hid/burned/destroyed the wheeled suitcase that contained all of the doctor's clothes. The new wardrobe Miss Jackie provided in its stead was a relief to the eyes.

"At least you didn't stick to monochrome," Dr. Robert grumbled after the incident. "Say, how did you know I'd like this sweater?"

He plucked at the purple cashmere jumper he was wearing. Miss Jackie huffed.

"Purple is your favourite colour, Robert."

Dr. Robert put on the most gormlessly sappy look after she said that.

On the eleventh day, after the final dose of lacewings was added, the potion bubbling in the electric skillet looked more like dark mud than liquid. Dr. Robert bottled the glutinous potion in several vials and stored them in a white box. Then he ladled a bit of the remaining potion into a shot glass.

"Time to test it," he said. Then he plucked out one of his own hairs and dropped it into the glass.

The potion hissed loudly like a boiling kettle and frothed madly. A second later, it turned into a confusing medley of colours that smelled, oddly enough, like freshly baked bread.

"Looks about right," said Dr. Robert. Then he blinked up at them. "Who wants to try?"

Neville, Harry, Ron, Hermione, Julia and Ginny looked at each other for a moment.

"I'll do it," said Harry.

"Your mother's going to kill me," muttered Dr. Robert as he handed over the glass.

"No, she won't," said Harry as he eyed the potion. "And won't you be able to get away?"

"I'll probably just lie down and let her do what she wants if something goes wrong."

"Why don't we all try?" said Miss Jackie. "Not you, Robert; you should stand by in case something does go wrong."

"But then we'd have an odd number," Dr. Robert protested.

Miss Jackie ignored him and ladled the potion into six disposable cups. Dr. Robert looked extremely unhappy as everyone dropped one of their hairs into the cup of potion they were given. Neville watched his turn into a rather homey pale yellow.

"Ooh, yours look like baked potato soup," said Julia, looking at his glass. Neville noted Julia's was a pleasant leaf-green that smelled

liked herbal tea.

"Label your cup, please," said Miss Jackie as she handed out pens. "Then switch your cup with someone else. No, not you," she added sternly when Dr. Robert made a move. "Can you conjure a few mirrors instead?"

Dr. Robert produced several standing mirrors. In the meantime, Neville took Harry's potion (which was a luxurious shade of gold), Hermione exchanged hers with Ginny's, Julia swapped cups with Miss Jackie, who then swapped cups with Ron. Harry kept his cup and Neville's potion was placed on a table.

"Ready?" said Dr. Robert.

"Ready," said everyone.

"Then go."

Neville drank the potion in one large gulp. It tasted like bittersweet chocolate.

Immediately his insides started writhing as though he'd just swallowed live snakes. Doubling up, he wondered whether he was going to be sick. Then a burning sensation spread rapidly from his stomach to the very ends of his fingers and toes. Next came a horrible melting feeling, as the skin all over his body bubbled like hot wax- and before his eyes, his hands turned thinner and his arms grew longer. Then his vision went all blurry and-

As suddenly as it had started, everything stopped. Neville straighten himself up, trembling, as he squinted around. So this was what it felt like, being Harry. His eyesight was now so bad he could barely make out the hazy images of his friends. Someone gave Neville a pair of glasses. Neville put them on and instantly his vision became clearer.

This might just be the most bizarre thing he had ever seen, Neville thought. There were two Dr. Roberts, one wearing school robes that were far too small for him. The Ron lookalike was wearing Miss Jackie's white blouse and black slacks, and the Julia lookalike was

swimming in Ron's old robes, looking bewildered. Neville turned to stare at a mirror nearby. Harry stared back at him. Neville scratched his ear. So did Harry. *Weird.*

"Feels a bit tight around the chest," said Ginny in teasing tone as Neville gazed at his new reflection.

"I think my slacks are falling down," said Hermione sardonically as she hitched them up through her robes.

"So this is what it's like to be tall," said Miss Jackie as she looked down at her exposed shins. "I'm not sure if I like it. How do you feel, Ron?"

Ron stepped in front of a mirror and turned shocked.

"This is unbelievable," said Ron as he fisted a hank of long dark brown hair. " *Unbelievable* ."

Then he looked down and considered the neck opening of his robes.

"Don't even think about it," said Julia severely while Hermione turned furious.

"So it worked," said Dr. Robert. "Now you seven sit tight until the potion wears off. That could be anywhere from one to three hours. Oh, and hand me over a hair."

Dr. Robert left after collecting everyone's hair. Then they lolled around the music chamber making music videos to pass time.

As it turned out, it took two hours for the transformation to wear off. Hermione said that this was a sign the potion was extremely potent. Sherlock got back to them with the preliminary results a few days later: the Polyjuice Potion didn't change their DNA profile.

"That's good news," said Hermione. "But I thought it would, since the Polyjuice changes more than just surface appearance."

"Actually it makes more sense that it doesn't," said Sherlock. " *Think* ! Does the information of the human Sirius cease to exist when he transforms into dog?"

Hermione crunched her face. "Mmm, no, I guess, since he can change back…"

"Precisely," said Sherlock. "Just because the medium that stored information is gone doesn't necessarily mean the information is gone."

Ron made a flying-over-one's-head gesture. Sherlock let out an impatient sigh.

"The Polyjuice potion is supposed to turn your body into a duplicate of your target person," Sherlock explained. "This would mean your brain was transformed to be a duplicate of the target person's brain as well. Memory is recorded in the brain. If the potion copies even information, your post-transformed self would possess the target person's memories since the brain was duplicated. Also, since you have the target person's brain, wouldn't you think and process information the same level as the target person?"

"Oh!"

"But that didn't happen," said Sherlock. "You still have your memories. You still think at the same level as you always did. Meaning, the potion's magic cannot touch certain kinds of fundamental information and its related processes. Therefore it cannot change DNA. This is quite in line with the fact DNA and the physical brain alone does not account for a person's appearance and intelligence."

They had more good news since then. Though whatever progress Professor Lupin made on his health were reversed after the full moon in mid-December, he was in extremely good spirits because he was shorted-listed to receive the experimental werewolf cure Julia discovered. The OBH wasn't going to broadcast the result, as they were primarily concerned about the Triwizard Tournament (and finding You-Know-Who's agent), but the event was going to be filmed and broadcasted via the news agency Miss Jackie founded. Though the agency was supposed to be a secret, they had privy to its existence thanks to Ron, who lately was running around like headless chicken because Miss Jackie put him in charge of directing the agency.

"The new hires are complete *sods*," Ron grumbled one evening. "Kept ignoring me until Miss Jackie said she's going to sack them all because they're not following company policy-namely listening to me. Then they balked when I showed them a YouTube video to give them an idea what we're planning. One of them flat out refused to watch because it's Muggle."

Hermione was outraged.

"I hope you gave them a piece of your mind!" she said furiously.

"I did," snarled Ron. "I told them I don't care if an idea came from a Wizard or Muggle or a bloody three-headed dog; if it's a good one, I'm going to use it. And if you don't want the Galleons rolling in, you can leave!"

Neville didn't know if the new hires stuck around or if Miss Jackie ended up sacking them all. But the first televised news appeared on the MMN a few days later. Students and teachers alike were *fascinated* . It was certainly something to see the actual event unfold before your eyes as a pretty witch in rose-coloured robes gave a verbal account of it. Soon it became a ritual for Hogwarts residents to sit at their tables in the Great Hall, take their MMN phones out and watch the daily news.

"At this rate, the agency is going to replace the *Prophet* as the major Wizarding News source," said Ginny.

"That's our goal," said Ron with grim satisfaction. "Take *that*, *Daily Prophet* ."

There were, of course, bad moments. Ron and Hermione were bickering worse than ever. The evening when they'd mutually abused the new hires of the MMN for their prejudice against Muggles was one of the few civil conversations they'd had since the Yule Ball. It didn't help that Hermione was in techy mood because people kept teasing her for being the girl Viktor Krum took the Ball, and Ron was still getting snide remarks over Rita Skeeter's article (Malfoy in particular missing no opportunity to remind him of it) when he wasn't getting ribbed for taking the Grandmaster's Granddaughter to the Ball and living to tell the tale.

Curiously, Hermione took to talking about Viktor Krum when she as angry at Ron, and Ron lavished Julia with all matter of flattery when he was furious at Hermione. It came to the point whenever Krum's name came up, Harry shouted: " *Not Interested* !" and whenever Ron gave Julia a compliment, she replied: "You had another fight with Hermione, haven't you?"

Speaking of Julia, she appeared deeply ambivalent towards the growing excitement over her discovery. Very few people knew about it at first; Dr. Robert asked them to keep the information to themselves, as he didn't want to hype things up. All the newspapers were silent on the subject until the MMN reported that the IWWS (International Werewolf Welfare Society) was trying out a new remedy that was recently discovered. An increasing number of articles about the remedy were published on the *Daily Prophet* since then, though they were widely off on who discovered the remedy, what the remedy involved and what the healers were doing about it.

"Can they get *any* news right?" said Hermione incredulously after reading one such article.

"Who cares, it good for us," said Ron.

Hermione glared at him. "Don't you realise this means the wizarding world suffered from systemic misinformation for perhaps *decades* ? Honestly, I'm appalled no one even thinks about it."

"You're not thinking about starting a society against false reporting, are you?" said Ron snidely.

"I could start something myself, of course, but Miss Jackie is already doing something about it," said Hermione.

Ron pointed a finger at himself, as though silently asking 'what about me?' Hermione pointedly ignored it.

"I'm kind of surprised Rita Skeeter isn't writing anything about it," Julia remarked. "You'd think she'd be right in the middle of all this gossip mongering."

"Who cares?" said Ron and Harry together.

"I have to agree," said Hermione. "We have enough going on already without that horrible Skeeter woman. Still, I do wonder what she's up to…"

So the days went by. Julia got an invitation to observe the first round of testing two weeks before the remedy was scheduled to be administered. She showed them the elaborate card inside the library, where the six of them had ensconced to do their homework, looking more subdued than happy.

"Aren't you glad for all those poor werewolves?" asked Hermione.

"Of course I am," sighed Julia. "I just don't want people to think I made a *discovery* ."

"But you did," said Ron, frowning. "You discovered a way to get rid of the curse."

"No, I didn't. It was Dr. Ju who figured it out. If anything, I was completely off-course, thinking about potions."

"But if you didn't tell him your idea, Dr. Robert would've never made the connection," said Ginny. "You're not giving yourself enough credit."

" *Whatever*," Julia huffed. "Anyway, we still don't know if it's going to work. I don't know what I'm going to do if the results turn out disappointing."

"Your bright optimism is as inspiring as usual," said Harry dryly.

"Yeah, I'm totally sunshine and daisies," Julia retorted.

The conversation ended on that note, and everyone went back to their previous activities.

Neville quietly studied his friends at his vantage point of the table. Hermione was busy doing her Runes homework, several dictionaries and scrolls scattered all around her. Ron was comparing several charts and graphs, occasionally looking up to scribble something for his History of Magic essay. Julia was typing on her laptop, Ginny was reading the *Quidditch Weekly*, and Harry was

using the summoning charm to retrieve the books he needed for homework.

They were all uniquely gifted, Neville thought. Harry had his deductions and deft hand in spells; Ron had excellent business sense, thus was able to manage the MMN since he was a third year; Ginny was bright, vibrant and popular, good at duelling and talented in Quidditch, if the last two-on-two match and her ability disable both Malfoy and Crabbe at the stands during the first task was any indication; Julia was nigh unbeatable when it came to the Cauldron and magic that didn't involve wands; Hermione, of course, was best at everything, so she could do whatever she wished…

What was he supposed to be doing? What was he good at? Nothing, really. His best subject was Herbology, but even there his marks were nowhere as good as Hermione's…

Neville was still brooding over his future when Ron hailed someone over.

"Hey, what are you doing here?"

Neville looked up and saw Cedric Diggory head towards their table, carrying an armful of books. Neville thought he looked rather worn and tired.

"Hello, Ron… everyone," he said. "I'm looking up ways to breath underwater."

"Oh, for the second task," said Hermione.

"You haven't figured that out yet?" asked Ron.

"I first thought to use the Bubble-head charm," Cedric sighed. "Then I tested it underwater. It worked okay for the first thirty minutes, but then I started feeling dizzy…"

Hermione let out a small: ' *Oh* !'

"It's probably because you were breathing in all the bad air you breathed out," she said.

Cedric slapped his forehead.

"I didn't think about that!" he groaned. "The bubble head charm wouldn't circulate air now, would it?"

"No."

"I don't suppose making a *bigger* bubble would solve the problem."

"You'd look ridiculous," said Ron.

"And you'd probably have a hard time swimming," Hermione added.

Cedric groaned again.

The seven of them started talking about ways to breath underwater. Hermione expounded the idea of transfiguring oneself, at least partially, into a submarine or something similar until she realised Cedric didn't know what a submarine was. Ron quite liked the idea of partial transfiguration, and suggested different animals and fishes as alternatives. Julia rejected goldfish and frog, pointing out they didn't do well in freezing cold water, and also rejected all marine mammals, reminding Ron that they didn't actually breath underwater. Harry mentioned Aqua-lungs, and after hearing what they did, an idea came to Neville's mind.

"Mmm, what about Gillyweed?" said Neville tentatively.

Everyone stared at him.

"It's, um, a magical plant from the Mediterranean Sea," said Neville. "It gives you gills."

Everyone stared some more. Then Harry closed his mouth.

"Neville, that was absolutely *brilliant*," he said. "I should've known someone as good at Herbology as you would think that up."

Neville went pink.

Final Notes : I've been ITCHING for the chance to cover the werewolf treatment. ETA-made a mistake on who Ron transformed to; it should be Julia, not Jack.

I thought about why Snape would mention the Polyjuice potion during Second year. Lacewing flies, according to JKR, represents 'an intertwining or binding together of two identities'. The two potions mentioned in CS are Hair-raising potion and Swelling Solution. I postulated second year students learned about potions that laced different magical properties together (swelling properties of ingredient A; growing properties of ingredient B; lacewing files that does the binding). The Shrinking Solution mentioned in POA was done quite early in the school year, so it is possible Snape was reviewing the previous year's material, which included the Shrinking Solution. I figured Snape told the students the Polyjuice potion is an advanced form of this class of potions.

Am I the only person who thought Cedric should've passed out from carbon dioxide poisoning when he used the Bubble-head charm to tackle the second task? Or that a certain Bug would suffocate whilst stuck in a sealed jar?

Two more chapters and year four will be done, I think. Bah, who am I kidding? It would probably take twice the number of chapters at the rate I'm going…

Luminous Oversight

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Three: Luminous Oversight

The sun was hanging low on London's skyline. A thin crowd covered her streets, as one could expect on a bitterly cold evening in February. Among the roaming people were a man-and-woman couple walking an enormous black dog. The man looked quite a bit older than his companion, with his greying hair and lined face, and he was wearing a long and threadbare overcoat covering a shabby tweed jacket, a hand-knit jumper and trousers. The woman had a heart shaped face, bright bubble-gum pink hair and wore heavily patched jeans and a bright purple hoodie bearing the words *The Weird Sisters* .

The two chatted as the dog trotted briskly before them, tail wagging.

"Is it okay for you to be out and about, Remus?" asked the woman as they crossed a street. "Aren't you supposed to get the treatment tonight?"

"This is part of my exercise regime," said the man named Remus. "I'm under strict orders to keep it. I may have also driven my young upstairs neighbour to distraction with my pacing. His mother all but forced me out of the flat when he started crying-again." Then he turned to the woman. "What about you, Tonks? Won't you get in

trouble for getting involved?"

"I'm training," said Tonks. "I'm observing how my uncle-in-law traces a murderer."

"Uncle-in-law?"

"Well, what exactly are you supposed to call your mother's mental older sister's husband's long-lost older brother?"

"Point," Remus conceded.

Remus and Tonks continued to walk down a pavement next to a row of flats. They stopped at modest three-story building in the corner. Remus pressed the buzzer and then froze when Tonks suddenly hooked her arm around his. An old woman holding a feather-duster opened the door before Remus could gather his wits.

"Wotcher," said Tonks brightly. "We're here to see the flat."

The woman's eyes drifted briefly at Remus and Tonks's joined arms and then at the dog sitting at their feet, tongue lolling. "Ah. Come this way, please."

The three of them entered the flat, Tonks bumping into a table hiding a hole in the parlour wall. Remus felt the warmth of the arm curled around his elbow burn through his coat as the old woman introduced herself as Martha and started prattling non-stop about the flat and the previous occupants.

"That's a very well-behaved dog you've got there, by the way," said Martha as they walked through a dingy and narrow hallway.

"Th-thank you," muttered Remus, grimacing as a peculiar smell that reminded him of dungbombs and skunk pierced everyone's noses, making the dog sneeze.

"Is he the type to bark at intruders?" asked Martha.

"He's the perfect guard dog," said Tonks without missing a beat. "Why do you ask? You don't have thieves in the neighbourhood, do you?"

"Ah, no, it's not that," said Martha, somehow blithely ignoring the pounding music that was rattling the walls. "It's just… another couple used to rent the flat you're about to see. The girl vanished a few days shy of Christmas." She paused. "Well, I say *girl*… more like a grown woman and then some…"

"Do you know what happened?" asked Remus.

"That's the thing, no one knows," said Martha in a hushed voice. "Richard went spare looking for her, but Sebastiana never turned up."

Remus wet his lips. "Were the police called?"

"I think so. Only… it's hard to prove foul play for this sort of thing, you know? I reckon the police just figured she left him. But I overheard Richard insisting she'd never leave him like this."

Remus nodded.

"What do you think, Martha?" asked Tonks after a beat. "Do you think Sebastiana just left?"

"Mmm, maybe," said Martha pensively as she took out a set of keys in front of a rickety door that had a heavily scared doorknob. "They got along well enough when they weren't fighting like cats and snakes, but I'm not sure if they actually *liked* each other… Between you and me, I think Sebastiana was more interested in Richard's *stories* than she was of him. Sebastiana was a writer of some sort, and Richard was helping her. Richard travelled around the world a lot as a soldier, you see, so he had plenty of interesting stories to tell."

"What kind of interesting stories?" Remus asked.

"Most of them were about the Middle East," said Martha. "He got deployed there many times, apparently. He even got a medal for a six month stint at somewhere called the Death Valley, but I might be wrong. I wasn't really paying attention because there's always a dead insurgent at the end of his tales…"

"Is he good?"

"I don't know," said Martha, shivering. "And I really *don't* want to know. For me to understand, he'll have to tell me how many people he killed, won't he?"

Remus nodded again. "I'm sorry if I upset you."

"Oh no, it's quite alright," said Martha as she opened the door. "*There*, here it is."

Tonks and Remus looked at the flat. It was empty except for a camp bed that had rusty frames in the corner and a lopsided bedside cabinet. The wallpaper was moldy, dirty and peeling off the edges. The floor had several months' worth of dust lying upon it, and the window blinds were brown with filthy cobwebs.

"It's not much to look at," said Martha, shaking her head. "I honestly don't recommend it. The other rooms in this house aren't that much better."

"Wait, aren't you the landlady?" blurted Remus.

"Oh, no," said Martha. "I just do the cleaning here once in a while. The owner asked me to sub after he checked himself in for losing almost half a year's worth of memories."

Remus, Tonks and the dog hastily left the premises after thanking Martha and agreeing to her advice that, even if money was tight, they really could do better. They ran into a narrow alleyway, and there the dog transformed into man wearing a black leather coat and jeans. The three then vanished with a small pop.

Remus, Tonks and the man in black, Sirius by name, reappeared in a basement flat about a second later.

"Definitely Moran," said Sirius in rush. "I bet he forgot to Obliviate Martha because she was just the cleaning lady."

Remus quietly agreed while trying not to get too excited. This was the first solid-looking clue he and Sirius uncovered since they'd started searching for 'Parker', the enigmatic military wizard Sherlock suspected was working for Lord Voldemort. It was possible they were jumping the magic carpet after hitting so many dead-ends

since learning who Parker really was.

Parker's real name was Sebastian Moran. John's older sister Harriet was able to identify him from the mugshot Lestrade provided because she, like Moran, was a former royal marine. Remus didn't understand most of the profanity-littered phone conversation the Watson sisters had over Moran, but Harriet mentioned Korengal Valley (also known as the Valley of Death), one hundred and nineteen confirmed kills, two hundred and thirty-five claimed kills, and a hushed up target practice incident that precipitated his discharge. John's reaction to this information was enough to convince Remus that he was an extremely dangerous man, and the first thing he did after the realisation was telling Sirius he was going to join him.

They had a day long fight after his announcement. Sirius shouted that he was perfectly capable of tackling Moran by himself, and if both he and Remus were gone, Harry would have no one connecting him to James. Remus argued tailing a person who was capable of killing hundreds of people alone was the height of stupidity, and he didn't want Harry to lose his godfather so soon after he got him back, thank you. Remus won the argument by virtue of John making the command decision that they were going to work together *or else* . So they did and made virtually no progress for weeks-that is, until Remus had his heart attack.

Sirius acted as recklessly as Remus feared he would during the complete bed-rest period of his convalesce: He asked a favour from Sherlock's older brother Mycroft to locate Moran. Remus wanted to rake Sirius over the coals when he learned what his old friend did. Though he met Mycroft only once, very briefly at the end of the 221B Christmas party, a fiasco no one wanted to admit to attending, Remus immediately had the impression Mycroft was the type of person who could arrange the takeover of an entire nation and succeed. He certainly did what Remus and Sirius couldn't do for weeks within a day.

Mycroft didn't provide a definite address. Couldn't, he said, as Moran wasn't foolish enough leave a paper trail. But Moran's face showed up in a few CCTV camera records and through these Mycroft was able to establish several locations as possible hide-outs. He

continued to update Sirius as he collected more data.

Moran moved around a lot, never staying in one location for more than a month. Once Remus got better enough to move about, he used his walks to investigate Moran's potential addresses with Sirius. The previous inquiries turned up nothing, as Moran was careful to erase all of his neighbours' and landlord/landlady's memories. Martha was the first person they'd met who even remembered someone had lived in the flat around the time Moran was there. They were nowhere near actually locating Moran, but at least they knew he was in the country… and he had had a female companion. The name *Sebastiana* was easy enough to figure out, and Richard's history lined up with Moran's. Who this woman was and why she agreed to swap names with Moran, Remus had no clue… unless 'Richard' was a reference to *Richard Brooke*…

"Not too fast," said Tonks. "This could be a trap: Leave an obvious clue so Moran can figure out who is after him."

Sirius and Remus looked at her.

"It's possible," said Remus.

"Yes, it's possible, but then so what?" Sirius argued. "For this to work as a proper trap, Martha will need to know true things about Moran to tell us about it. If it isn't trap, she still told us true things about Moran."

"But if it is a trap, we might've given the search away," said Remus. "We didn't erase Martha's memory. She'll remember what we look like. Dogs that look like your animagus form aren't exactly common, Sirius, and Tonks is quite striking."

"Oh, she won't remember," said Tonks confidently. "You two may have scruples over modifying old Muggle ladies' memories, but I don't. Anyway, I made her forget about *us*, but left her memory of the visit itself intact."

Remus admired the subtle brilliance of this. "That was amazing."

Tonks grinned.

"Thanks. Anyway, back to Moran: he might still figure out Martha was memory charmed, and err on the side of caution and go underground," she said.

"Or he might be too worried about finding his girlfriend to think about Martha," said Sirius sarcastically.

Remus sighed. "Yes, there are many possible explanations and outcomes. Why don't we discuss this with everyone so we can know what to do next?"

The three of them went upstairs. There they were intercepted by Molly Weasley, who was holding a squirming Benedict close to her bosom. Young master Benedict looked no happier than he did yesterday after he got something John called 'immunization shots'- he'd been crying non-stop ever since.

" *Shhhhh*," said Molly urgently. "The poor dears are asleep. Don't wake them."

Remus shut his mouth, not to comply, but to conceal his shock over the notion of Sherlock *sleeping* . He peered at the room down the hall next to the kitchen in a futile hope to see this mysterious anomaly. As suspected, the door was closed and a white sheet of paper that had red symbols written on it was taped on the door's surface. No noise came through.

"But this is important," Sirius protested. "Sherlock will flip out."

Molly wagged a finger at him.

"Yes, I know he acts like a child where his cases are concerned. In fact, he's been acting like a boy who'd stayed up far past his bedtime all day today. So even if you wake him up now, he'll be of no use. It can wait until morning." Then she turned to Remus. "Shouldn't you be on your way? Today is an important day for you!"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Remus, smiling in a placating way. "In case you're wondering: no, Sherlock didn't make me work until the very last minute. I needed a breather before I left."

Molly exhaled. "Well, if you say so…"

Roughly around the same time Remus was portkeyed to the werewolf treatment testing site, Hermione and Ron were heading to the music room, ostensibly for their flute and piano lessons respectively. Fred and George Weasley were inclined to be sceptical when Ron told them where he was headed and why. Hermione couldn't think why they would be so.

Because they really *did* have music lessons- Hermione and Ron had intentionally scheduled them on that day and hour because they wanted to see the werewolf cure being administered (at least Hermione did, very badly), and they needed to be in a discreet location in order to do that, as the event was a secret. The two couldn't go to the test site itself, as they weren't involved in the cure's development like Julia and weren't donating their blood like Harry, who happened to have the same blood type as Professor Lupin.

"I thought you can only donate blood if you're an adult," said Hermione after she learned Harry's part in the testing. "And don't you have anaemia, Harry?"

"I'm not donating an entire pint," said Harry. "The healers don't know how much blood you need in order for the treatment to be effective, so they're varying the amounts."

"I see," said Hermione. "So why can't *we* donate blood? Won't the healers need all sorts of blood types?"

"Yes, and I'm not sure exactly," said Julia. "I asked Dumbledore, and he said there's more to the cure than just giving blood to someone-something about the donor needing to know the recipient personally."

"Why is that?" asked Ron.

"That is what I don't understand," Julia said. "Anyway, assuming he's right-and he probably is-then the only person we can donate blood to is Lupin, and the only person who has the right blood type for it is Harry."

Hermione had been deeply disappointed at the prospect of never seeing the event until Julia said she could stream her memory of the event live over the MMN. Julia and Harry proceeded to spend the week prior to the event learning how to do it. While the two worked on that, Hermione and Ginny formulated their excuses-Hermione and Ron would use their music lessons, and Neville and Ginny would use their four-poster beds to watch after everyone in their dorm fell asleep. Hermione could barely sleep during that week, so excited was she at the prospect of witnessing history being made.

On D-day, Harry left Hogwarts after dinner, claiming that he was heading off for his biweekly trip to London, and Julia slipped away quietly at some point in evening. No one appeared to think their absence was odd. Hermione and Ron left the Gryffindor common room as soon as they could. It took them longer than usual, as the twins needed a forceful hand (i.e. Ginny's Bat-Bogey Hex).

"Don't know why they are like that," Ron grumbled as they hurriedly made their way to the third floor. "They know I spend half of my life in the music room."

"Do you think they know what we're up to?" said Hermione worriedly. "This is supposed to be secret! What if-"

"Is it necessary a bad thing, Fred and George suspecting?" said Ron. "I mean they might take the mickey out of us, sure, but they won't spread bloody rumours or some such rot." He thought about it for a moment. "Actually, I don't want them to take the mickey out of us, either. It'll be *hell* ."

Hermione snorted as they entered the music room. Immediately Hermione noticed there were five Miss Jacquelines instead of the usual maximum of four. Hermione instantly spotted the cause.

"Aren't you supposed to be, um, somewhere else?" she asked.

"Still got time," said Dr. Robert without looking up. He was simmering something that was a delicious shade of golden-brown in a stainless-steal saucepan. There was a Miss Jacqueline sitting in a chair nearby, her arms folded over the backrest. She was frowning at the array of ingredients placed in custard cups and square plates

painted to look like sides of a dice.

"I don't need feeding, Robert," said this Miss Jackie.

"Of course you don't," said Dr. Robert agreeably. "I wouldn't *dream* of feeding you. Open your mouth and let the broomstick in didn't even cross my mind. Nope, not at all."

Miss Jackie scowled. "You know perfectly well how I react to certain grains, land animals and their-"

"-edible byproducts," said Dr. Robert, grinning broadly. "I don't like them either, lack of allergies aside."

One of the free Miss Jacquelines ushered Hermione into an available screen as Dr. Robert set his sauce on fire.

"Are you the real Miss Jackie or a clone?" Hermione asked.

"Clone," the Miss Jackie duplicate replied pleasantly.

Hermione thought as much. Miss Jacqueline's clones felt more… wooden than the original, particularly when Dr. Robert was around.

Hermione practiced playing the flute rendition of *Gabriel's oboe* that evening. She quickly became frustrated because her efforts didn't sound as beautiful as the ideal version she had in mind. Miss Jackie's clone's rather predictable encouragements only made her more irritated.

"I want to learn from the real person," she complained. "It's just not the same."

The clone smiled sadly.

Hermione took a break about halfway into her lesson. By that time, there was only one straggler in the music room besides Ron. She was one of the younger students who'd taken to following Harry around in the corridors like a lost duckling back when the Heir of Slytherin terrorized Hogwarts. Most of those students went on with their lives after the Basilisk got vanquished, but this girl lingered, even continuing the music lessons many had started to stay in

Harry's proximity in the evenings.

"Hello Luna," said Hermione cautiously.

Luna Lovegood turned her large, protuberant eyes at Hermione, who tried not to stare too obviously at the radish earrings, the necklace of Butterbeer corks or the wand tucked over her ear. In her hands was an open copy of *the Quibbler*, and it was upside down.

"Oh, hello," said Luna. "I wasn't expecting anyone here in this hour."

That's my line, Hermione didn't say. "This was the only time I could have my lessons this week."

Luna nodded. "I've been told you're often very busy."

There was prolonged moment of awkward silence.

"Do you, um, normally have lessons this late?" asked Hermione.

"Yes," said Luna. "It's always peaceful and I get to sing to the moon."

"… Why do you sing to moon?"

"To call a Crumple-horned Snorkack," said Luna placidly. "They love singing and the moon."

Hermione knew she didn't avoid talking to Luna for no reason; clearly her aura of dottiness was not just show.

"Crumple-horned Snorkacks don't exist," Hermione scoffed.

"Yes they do," Luna insisted. "I read it in *the Quibbler* ."

"You read that rubbish and actually believe what it says?"

"Excuse me," said Luna; her voice had suddenly lost its dreamy quality. "My father's the editor."

Hermione felt abashed. "Oh, I-well, the articles are interesting, I suppose…"

A Miss Jackie came over before embarrassment could overtake her. "It's time for your lesson, Luna," she said.

"That would be my cue," said Luna coldly, then she turned heel and disappeared into one of the many noise-cancelling screens. The Miss Jackie who called in Luna followed her inside.

Hermione returned to her own screen. The Miss Jackie clone there resumed the latter-half of her lessons soon afterwards. Hermione spent most of it quite distracted, as she couldn't wait to watch the werewolf cure testing. It was the first time she felt like time was going too slowly in a long while.

Hermione left her screened enclosure as soon as she put her flute away. She immediately noticed Dr. Robert was no longer there. In fact, the music room looked empty. The tall windows showed the darkened sky, and the few stars that were making an appearance. The full moon, however, had not yet risen.

Hermione waited a few heartbeats. Ron eventually jumped out of his screened enclosure and joined Hermione in her anxious waiting. Miss Jackie closed down the music room and banished her clones. Then she set up her MMN phone to project to a clear wall, and arranged the chairs for them to sit.

They didn't have to wait very long before Miss Jackie's phone lit up.

The holograph showed a sparsely furnished room that had chalk-white walls and a long, narrow skylight on the ceiling. There were about thirty some people inside. Most of them looked ill and grey, and wore expressions of restlessness, anticipation and doubt. There was also a fretful-looking woman wearing purple robes holding a little boy and a thin old man who bore a remarkable resemblance to Professor Lupin. Standing next to this man, nervously plucking at the plaster on his arm and talking to Sirius, was Professor Lupin.

The scenery changed. Now the holograph showed a different room. It was dimly lit and there was a glass window running the entire length of a wall. Harry and Julia were sitting in front of that window, and they were looking at Hermione, Ron and Miss Jackie's direction. Behind the two, on the other side of the glass, they could see the

thirty people from the previous scene.

"Hello," said Harry.

"Where are you?" asked Ron.

"No idea. We took a portkey to get here, and they didn't tell us where we are."

"Why all the secrecy?" asked Hermione.

"Just in case," said Julia. "Coming here for treatment means you're a werewolf, right? Even if the treatment works, the fact that you were a werewolf before but didn't tell anyone might have negative consequences. I mean, the Ministry of Magic for one might give you a stiff fine for not alerting the Werewolf Registry."

"Why would anyone want the Ministry to know they are a werewolf?" said Hermione indignantly. "They make you relocate to a werewolf halfway house and tell all your neighbours, friends and family that you're a werewolf. That's no better than going to prison."

"Well, I'm sure there are people who appreciate how this measure would theoretically keep them safe from lycanthropy," said Harry dryly. "Anyway, everyone got their blood transfusion. Dumbledore invoked a ritual while the Healers did it: *Blood of a friend, willingly given, and you will restore your beloved…* "

"Sounds creepy," said Ron.

"Actually, I thought it made perfect sense," said Julia softly.

"How?"

It was difficult to decypher the expression Julia put on. It was as if she had turned into a different person without any outward physical change.

"This is my blood shed for you," she murmured cryptically.

Everyone went silent afterwards. Hermione was acutely aware of the sound of the clock ticking as she kept switching from looking at the

window and the holographic projection of the werewolf treatment testing site.

Several minutes pasted. The sky turned darker and darker in meantime. Ron kept fidgeting and vibrating his leg, much to Hermione annoyance. Miss Jackie hummed to herself. Harry and Julia just watched the people pacing at the other side. Occasionally, the two looked up at the dark skylight.

Then roughly at around nine, the full moon crept above the Forbidden Forest's canopy.

Hermione stared breathlessly as the light of the full moon poured in through the skylight, illuminating both the room and the occupants. All the occupants looked up, staring at the moon apprehensively.

No one changed. Not even one.

Hermione let out a shuttering breath as slowly, one by one, the ex-werewolves looked at themselves in astonishment and then at each other. An incredulous, disbelieving noise grew in crescendo as they started to touch their bodies, still in human form despite the full moon. The woman in purple began to weep loudly as she held her boy tightly.

A little ways behind the woman and boy were three men. It was Sirius and the old man who greatly resembled Professor Lupin huddling around a third person. Though you couldn't see him, but you could tell who it was.

"Ohmygosh it *worked*," Harry breathed, hand over his mouth and eyes shining. "I can't believe it actually *worked* ."

Julia didn't say anything; she was too busy crying into her hands.

What happened afterwards was a blur. Hermione vaguely recalled Dr. Robert telling the test subjects the follow ups he needed them to show up for, in order to see how long the treatment's effects would last. Hermione didn't know when Miss Jackie left, but she was nowhere to be seen by the time she and Ron prepared to return to the Gryffindor tower.

A familiar, dreamy voice halted them in their tracks:

"That was lovely."

Hermione and Ron whirled around to face the owner of the voice. Luna? Luna Lovegood was still *here* ? How?

For a few seconds the two of them just silently sputtered at Luna, who looked at them as though she was regarding a mildly interesting television show.

"What… how…" Ron gibbered.

"You're not supposed to see that!" Hermione squawked in dismay. "It was supposed to be a secret! Oh, please, please, don't tell anyone-"

"It's alright," said Luna, unfazed. "I won't tell. No one will believe me even if I did. Most people think I only believe in impossible things, you know. That's why they call me Loony Lovegood."

Hermione started to let go of the breath she was holding. Perhaps it was going to be alright, after all.

But then Luna's next bland comment made her heart stop:

"By the way, you play *Nella Fantasia* very well."

Final Notes : The long awaited werewolf chapter and a Tonks & Lupin scene… Even Luna enters the picture at last! I am so happy. I'm sorry for the month wait. But my crazy summer is almost over-I only have a half-marathon to run in three weeks. I plan to return to the previous update pace afterwards.

Nella Fantasia ("In My Fantasy") is a song based on the theme " *Gabriel's Oboe* " from the film The Mission (1986). I'm not crazy about the song, but " *Gabriel's Oboe* " is one of the most beautiful pieces of music I've ever heard.

I sincerely apologise for what I'm going to do next.

Making a Bow

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Four: Making a Bow

"… *You've been eavesdropping on us?* " Ron shouted, opting to act overly-indignant to cover his dismay. "How dare you! Don't you know the point of noise-cancelling screens?! Don't you have any respect for people's privacy!?"

"I'm sorry," said Luna, her protuberant eyes unblinkingly focused on Ron. "But I couldn't resist. You're part of the Rotfang Conspiracy, aren't you?"

Ron was completely nonplussed at the comment that was entirely out of the norm, as well as out of the blue.

" *What* ?"

"The Magical Mobile Network is one of the Conspiracy's biggest funders, my dad said so," said Luna simply.

Ron didn't quite clutch his head, but it was a near thing.

"… Are you taking the mickey?" he asked, frowning.

"Of course not. Why would I joke about such a noble cause?" said Luna. "My dad and I are very supportive of any anti-Ministry action!

Dad's always saying he'd believe anything of Fudge; I mean, the number of goblins Fudge has had assassinated! And of course he uses the Department of Mysteries to develop terrible poisons, which he secretly feeds to anybody who disagrees with him. And then there's his Umgubular Slashkilter-"

Hermione looked like she wanted to both cry and pull out her hair at this point. Ron felt corresponding emotions.

"Now don't worry about this either," said Luna brightly. "Some secrets need to stay as secret, and what you're doing is definitely one of those. So I won't tell."

"… Okay. Thanks. You do that," muttered Ron, not at all reassured.

Luna smiled faintly. Then she glided out of the Music Room, dreamily humming *Nella Fantasia* all the way. Ron turned to Hermione after the door shut.

He turned completely alarmed at the tears splashing down Hermione's face.

"Oh, this is horrible… absolutely horrible…" she sobbed. "I can't believe I forgot… John *told us* not to hold our meetings here, but I…"

"It's just her," said Ron. "And who's going to believe someone like *that* ?"

"But what if there were *others* ?" wailed Hermione, more tears falling. "It's really easy to do, now that I think about it… All you have to do is lift the curtains a bit! What if the agent already knows everything? What if *You-Know-Who* knows everything? It's all ruined! And n-now we have to t-tell Sherlock, and he's going to be so angry and-"

"We don't know that!" said Ron fiercely. "Anyway, it's not your fault we forgot! We all did! We never would've made it this far without you, anyway! And you don't have to tell Sherlock on your own, I'll be there too!"

"Oh, Ron!"

Hermione flung her arms around Ron's neck and broke down completely. Ron was completely frozen on his spot, his heart thudding like a racing steam engine, as Hermione soaked his chest. Mind blank, and not knowing what else he was supposed to do, Ron patted her very awkwardly on the top of the head.

Finally, Hermione drew a way.

"We'll have to tell Dumbledore, too," she said in a wobbly voice. "But what if it's too late?"

"Oh - well - Dumbledore's really brilliant," said Ron, feeling both immensely bereft and relieved. "I'm sure he'll think of something… if not him, there's always Sherlock. I suppose we can even ask Miss Jackie as a last resort." He looked around. "Where is Miss Jack, anyway?"

Jacqueline Shin cradled the cup of tea Arthur Weasley pressed into her hands. Molly Weasley was bustling about in the Burrow's cramped kitchen, looking for the biscuit tin. She eventually located it inside one of the cabinet drawers that also contained something that growled. After dumping all the biscuits on a plate, Molly joined Arthur and Jacqueline at the scrubbed table.

"Thank you so much for taking the time to see me," muttered Jacqueline as Molly pushed the plate of biscuits to her.

"Oh, it's nothing dear," said Molly kindly. "So what did you want to ask us about?"

Jacqueline sucked in her lips, wetting it, before she started to speak haltingly.

"How long have you and Arthur been married?"

"Twenty-five years," answered Molly.

"So you must know a lot about how it's like to be married."

"I suppose," said Molly curiously. "But why are you wondering about

it? Are you thinking about marriage?"

Jacqueline turned bright red. Arthur choked on his tea and Molly practically leaped out her chair in excitement.

"Oooooh! You *are* !"

"We've been talking about it," mumbled Jacqueline, still glowing red. "He actually proposed before we even started seeing each other, but that's beside the point. I…" she turned redder. "… I, um, something happened recently that made me… that is to say, I suddenly felt like-"

"-you really wanted to marry him?"

Jacqueline squeaked and hid her face behind her hands. Molly and Arthur smiled indulgently.

"I'm so happy for you, dear," said Molly, patting Jacqueline's not-quite-bony shoulder. "This is wonderful news. Your man is very lucky."

Jacqueline peaked over the tips of her fingers. "Thank you."

Molly eagerly asked when Jacqueline expected her Significant Other to propose. Jacqueline told her he'd been proposing on a weekly basis except recently, and remarked all she would have to do is say yes the next time he did it. After clicking her tongue at the decidedly awkward nature of these proposals, Molly asked Jacqueline what kind of wedding she wanted. Jacqueline said she wanted just go to the marriage registry office and be done with it, because otherwise she would have to hold *three* ceremonies: one wizard, one according to the traditions of her fatherland, and one Muggle. Molly elbowed Arthur in the ribs before he could ask something about the last.

"Don't you want to celebrate with your friends and family?" asked Molly.

"I guess I'm too worried about marriage life to think about celebrating it," said Jacqueline.

"You'll do fine, dear," said Molly. "I mean, it's good to worry about it a little, but it's not like you and he are rushing into it at a young age."

"Older age doesn't necessarily mean maturity," mumbled Jacqueline. "And if you have a temper, it's…"

Molly regarded Jacqueline thoughtfully.

"What's troubling you?" she asked.

Jacqueline shifted her tea cup between her hands at the question.

"You know what my father is most famous for, don't you?" Jacqueline began.

"Are you talking about a certain incident?" asked Molly carefully.

"Yes," Jacqueline sighed. "That temper… is a family trait. I've done my share of cruel revenges." She paused. "There was a group of students who made sport of tormenting me when I was young. I decided since they enjoy my misery so much, I would ensure they would feel nothing but that a hundredfold."

"That was *you* ?" Arthur exclaimed.

Jacqueline nodded glumly. "My father claimed responsibility so I wouldn't get into trouble."

There a bout of silence.

"I shouldn't have done it," whispered Jacqueline.

"No one can blame you for doing it," said Molly stoutly. "Bullying is horrible thing to go through, and the pain you experienced was exceptionally bad."

"But my curse almost cost several people their sanity," said Jacqueline dejectedly. "I fear what I'm capable of doing out of anger. And maybe one day he'll make me angry enough to do something equally horrible. Harming him is the last thing I want, but…" she glared at her teacup. "… he can make me *so angry* sometimes…"

Molly and Arthur shared a knowing look.

"That's quite normal, dear," said Molly gently. "Family brings the best and the worst out of us. So it shouldn't surprise you that he's doing just that. You and he are thinking of starting a family, after all."

Jacqueline blinked a few times before smiling wanly.

"I never thought of it that way," she said. "But still, I'd rather not fight to begin with. My family and I tend to inflict irreversible damage when we're angry."

"You'll manage," said Molly reassuringly. "There isn't a married couple in the world that doesn't fight, and I dare say your parents had their share of spats. Fighting isn't the end of the world, you know. As long as you two are committed in staying together, it'll work out. I mean, just look at Arthur and I. During the second year of our marriage, and around the time when we had Fred and George, I was jinxing Arthur every other day."

Jacqueline blinked at this. Arthur, on the other hand, chuckled.

"I almost got quarantined in the Ministry for contracting dragon-pox when Molly turned my skin green," he said. "I must've escaped the ward somehow, because I remember going to the apothecary to buy a remedy."

"Perkins let you out because I told him to, Arthur. Now, do remember that time I turned you into a sea urchin? I don't even remember why you made me so angry, but there you go."

Jacqueline stared wide-eyed as Arthur and Molly listed the horrible things they'd done to each other over the years, and what they had done to make up for these fights. Most of the reconciliation efforts featured either Arthur or Molly doing silly things to make the other laugh before apologising.

"… When it comes down to it, it's all about forgiving each other and making up," Molly concluded.

"And not doing it alone," added Arthur. "Your friends and a family need to be in it together."

"We are going to have trouble with that," said Jacqueline ruefully. "Neither of us have much family or friends."

"But you have them, don't you? And you're here because you want to do the right thing," said Molly. "Have you met his family, yet?"

"I met his family in spirit a few weeks ago," said Jacqueline, blushing. "The family who owns the room he's been renting since uni, the Bryans, they all but adopted him when he started living in their house after he got orphaned a second time."

"How did it go?"

"I… think it went well," said Jacqueline hesitantly. "I was a bit overwhelmed. Mrs. Bryan puts more energy in her greetings than what most people spend for an entire day."

She lifted her hands up as if to show what Mrs. Bryan had done, but after a few blinks, she put her hands back down.

"I don't think I can do her justice," said Jacqueline. "Anyway she, um, used the endearment 'honey' to me after we were introduced. The Bryans treated me to American barbeque at their home. Mrs. Bryan's son Tim grilled ten pounds worth of meat, and her younger daughter Shachia cooked enough to feed twenty people. The older daughter Sharai hugged me for over a minute when time came for us to part."

Molly smiled. "Sounds like they really like you, dear. Now what about him? Did he meet your family?"

Jacqueline nodded.

"How did that go?"

Jacqueline dropped her head into her hands and clutched at her hair.

"They didn't like him?" asked Arthur, wincing.

"That's not the problem," groaned Jacqueline. "The problem is my father. He refuses to accept the notion he and I are together. I don't

understand why. My father calls him Stupid and Bonehead to his face, and he only does that when he feels comfortable with someone. I can count the number of people who has the honour with one hand."

"What about the rest of your family?" Molly asked.

"Greg and Ellen don't mind him, and he gets along well with Jason. Jeremy can't stand the sight of him, but that's because he dresses like a clown." She sighed. "The person who has the most trouble is Julia. It can't be helped-as far as she's concerned, I'm her mother. She actually thought Greg and I was husband and wife until Jason told her the truth. It upset her so much she cried a fortnight."

"That must have been very awkward for you," said Molly sympathetically.

"You have no idea," said Jacqueline ruefully. "Julia wasn't the only person pushing it. I think my brothers hoped we'd get married, too. At least Jason did; I'm pretty sure he put a curse on Greg after his talk with Julia that made every single one of his relationships fail for the next three years. We still don't know how he did it; he was only sixteen at the time, and he generally doesn't care for magic unrelated to food."

Molly and Arthur stared at Jacqueline, looking perturbed.

"I really had to put my foot down," said Jacqueline. "Me and Greg… it's wrong on too many levels."

"Brother-in-law and the age difference," said Molly knowingly.

"Yes; but even if those two things weren't a factor, it would've been wrong," said Jacqueline. "Did you know my sister died protecting Greg?"

Molly and Arthur stared again.

"You-Know-Who went after her-or she went after him. It doesn't matter," said Jacqueline softly. "The duel she had with You-Know-Who was exactly the kind of head-on collision I would have expected her to do if she felt threatened. No one knew what

happened to her until Greg knocked on our door. It took us a while to come around to the notion of Cecilia marrying, but from that moment on, he was forever branded as the man my sister loved to death."

Jacqueline smiled wryly.

"I dare not touch someone like that."

There was a long moment of silence.

"So your future fiancé, who is he? Do we know him?" asked Molly.

"He met Arthur before," Jacqueline replied.

"I did?" said Arthur blankly. "When? Who is it?"

Jacqueline told him.

"… No, seriously, who?" said Arthur.

Jacqueline covered her face in defeat.

Around the time Arthur and Molly Weasley were pressing Jacqueline to tell them the real person she wanted to share her life with, Dumbledore and Shin were returning to the Headmaster's office, having hours before overseen the werewolf test treatment's administration at an undisclosed location.

"What a night," said Dumbledore as he settled into his high-backed chair.

"Mmmn," Shin grunted.

"It was quite something to see Robert in his element," Dumbledore remarked. "Have you noticed he didn't leave the room after administering the treatment?"

Shin made a noncommittal noise.

"His answer to my inquiry as to why was quite striking," said

Dumbledore. " 'The treatment isn't over.' "

"Your hints are lacking their usual subtlety," said Shin dryly. "They're hitting me like Bludgers."

"Well, I've been receiving many complaints on the matter," said Dumbledore. "I admit he takes a bit of getting used to, but surely you do not have problems with him now."

"I have many problems with him," Shin retorted. "And you only say this because you've never raised your own daughters."

"Perhaps, but I didn't expect this kind of blatant denial from you."

"I'm not denying anything," snapped Shin. "Denying means there is something real that I'm failing to acknowledge. I have no reason to acknowledge as real a relationship that involves a man who doesn't have the courage to tell me."

"Have you considered the possibility your insistence of calling him idiot to his face is part of the problem?"

"No," said Shin shortly. "And I'm calling him for what he is."

Dumbledore was shaking his head when there was a knock at the door.

"Enter," said Dumbledore as Shin vanished from sight.

The door opened, and Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger nervously stepped inside the office, followed by Harry Potter and Julia Lestrade.

"Good evening," said Dumbledore pleasantly. "How can I help you in this late hour?"

Hermione looked down at her feet and Ron shuffled nervously.

"Professor, there's something we need to tell you…"

" *This*," growled Sherlock as he paced furiously, "is why I abhor help."

John (and Benedict) watched him pace from the vantage point of the red armchair.

"You would've never made it this far without help," John pointed out, and Benedict burbled as though in agreement.

Sherlock continued to scowl, which was quite a show of restraint all things considered. John had expected him to burst into an angry tirade when a very despondent Hermione- with Ron standing protectively behind her- told them that morning someone might've eavesdropped into their meetings in the Music Room… and yes, they had had *all* of their meetings in the Music Room because they thought it wasn't necessary to look for alternative meeting locations. So far they knew one girl had eavesdropped at least once for sure, but there might be others… *several* others.

"And considering how young they are, they did an exceptionally good job," John continued. "Hermione's idea was inspired and the idea itself wouldn't have worked without Ron."

"I know that!" snapped Sherlock, making Benedict whimper in an instant. Then in his regular voice, he said: "Why do you think I didn't reprimand them further?"

John smiled briefly at way Sherlock quickly modulated his tone before sobering.

"So our security has been compromised. What now?"

"Traditional spy craft would call us to find the extent of the leak," said Sherlock, pacing faster. "But we only have a week and a half to figure that out. The Second Task is scheduled to happen on February twenty-fourth, and if the agent is among those who have overheard our talk, he may be working on a different method to obtain his objective at a different time frame even as we speak. Either way, we don't have enough *time* ."

John nodded grimly. "Do you have any idea who might know what

we're up to?"

"Only two, so far: The student Hermione reported and Rita Skeeter."

"Wait, *Skeeter* ?"

John stared at Sherlock, who stopped pacing for a moment.

"Isn't it obvious?" said Sherlock. "Remember those articles she wrote about Harry for the *Prophet.* "

"I've been reading nothing but baby literature since September. I only know about Rita Skeeter because Harry complained to me about her."

Sherlock sighed impatiently and headed over to the sitting room table. There he picked up the case scrapbook- *case Index*, Sherlock insisted-where he recorded all his magical crime cases and handed it over to John, opening it to the current case section. There were two *Daily Prophet* articles pasted there. John read the highlighted paragraphs:

Violin playing is another hidden talent Harry Potter possesses. He played two eighteenth century violin solos titled ***Liebesleid*** *and* ***Siciliano*** *with considerable mastery when the Daily Prophet came to visit, as well as a Scottish ballad. Ireilas Oinotna, famed classical violinist from Vienna, confirmed the first two pieces were 'intermediate to advanced' level, though he criticized Potter's music instructor for choosing such obscure Muggle compositions when there were options in the Wizarding Music Instructional repertoire that were far more suitable…*

… the music lessons were definitely Potter's Muggle foster parents' idea, though their motive for pushing music lessons requires further scrutiny. Several students confirmed Potter was forced to learn piano and cello rather than violin, which he is clearly partial to, for many years…

"Notice she listed the music pieces Harry plays," said Sherlock while John sputtered in outrage. "It is one of the few accurate pieces of information in this article. The question is: how did she obtain it?

Dumbledore wouldn't let someone this enchantingly nasty into Hogwarts, Jacqueline wouldn't disclose the info to her, and Harry's ability to perform to an audience is sketchy at best- Christmas party, case in point."

"He plays to an audience just fine; he's just not a young Jascha Heifetz, you daft tit," snapped John. "So Rita Skeeter somehow eavesdropped into his music lessons; not really a stretch to think she might have eavesdrop into the meetings too."

"Nor is it a stretch to think she would spy on *us* to gather more reporting material," said Sherlock as he resumed his pacing. "I've set the stage to catch her in the act in the greenhouse, but so far nothing."

"… Is *that* why you planted the moss roses?" said John incredulously. "You know what, that was really clever. Everyone thought moss roses are my favourite flower because that's the only reason why you would personally plant them inside a citrus flower garden. Rita would probably think the same and hide there, figuring we'd eventually show up for a romantic moment." Then John pulled a face. "Ugh, just thinking about it makes me want to hurl."

"Forget your disgust, I don't understand why she didn't take the bait," Sherlock grumbled. "Even if I failed to catch Skeeter in the act, she would've published an article about Harry Potter's Muggle Parents. We can't possibly be so boring as to leave someone like Skeeter with nothing to write about."

"Yeah, especially considering you've-oh, let me think-hosted a wizard-themed Christmas party that had Arthur Weasley and Muggles not in the know as guests, got turned into a sea urchin at the aforementioned party because you enticed Arthur to enchant baby products, then into a toad after you critiqued Harry's *Silent Night* performance, and then drowned one of Sirius's presents for Molly in embalming liquid."

"How was I supposed to know the bug was a present?"

"It's common courtesy to not touch other people's things."

" *Dull*," Sherlock scoffed. "But the lack of articles by Skeeter *is* rather curious. She is the type to do anything for a story, and we gave her enough gossip fodder to last a year. It's possible the *Daily Prophet* is refusing to publish her articles, but that doesn't stop her from publishing in other news publications. At any rate, I doubt the *Prophet* would refuse to use her articles. Jacqueline's systemic attack would've left them desperate for anything newsworthy."

"You really think Jack's out to get the *Prophet* ?" asked John, eyebrows up. "I find it hard to believe she found the necessary mean-streak to actively work on bankrupting them."

"What other possible motive can she have? Jacqueline despises business operations and the Magical Televised News Channel she developed involves nothing *but.* "

John shook her head. "I still prefer to think she felt protective over Ron and went overboard."

"It doesn't matter," said Sherlock dismissively. "For whatever reason, Skeeter stopped publishing articles. There are too many unknowns and not enough data to deduce why. If she is an independent agent, she may have had her own reasons. If she had connections to LV's agent, then perhaps the agent finished her off after obtaining the information he needed from her. Either way, the weight of importance lies on the *agent,* who I'm inclined to think either doesn't know the state of our investigation or does know but is hiding it from LV."

"Why do you think so?" asked John.

"Harry hasn't had any new visions," said Sherlock. "Think of the circumstances behind the previous ones. The first vision occurred when LV finally set his comeback plans into motion, thus would've been feeling particularly excited and murderous. The second vision was when Wormtail almost botched the entire operation because he neglected to mention Harry's name change, thus LV was feeling *particularly* murderous and angry. Therefore it appears that whenever LV is feeling a strong surge of hatred or excitement, Harry sees what he is doing."

John thought about it.

"No vision- *yet* - means LV doesn't know we're very close to discovering his agent," said John. "Because there is no way he wouldn't get angry that his second supposedly more reliable agent is on the cusp of failure, too."

"Hence my theory either the agent himself doesn't know or is hiding it," said Sherlock. "Now, if the agent doesn't know, then we are safe to proceed as planned. But suppose the agent *does* know, but is hiding the knowledge from LV, with the assumption that he can actually do this, despite the fact LV is one of the greatest mind-readers the wizarding world has ever known, according to Albus Dumbledore. *Why would he do that?* Dumbledore suggested to me the theory that the agent is engaged in a rather heated rivalry with Moran. The magical drug-smuggling case Lestrade brought to my attention last year certainly hinted that Moran and the agent are not in amicable terms. Our mutual conclusion is that the agent would hide the knowledge least he give Moran an advantage."

John stared at Sherlock for several beats.

"I thought you stopped talking to Dumbledore because he rarely gives you a straight answer," said John in a low voice.

"Yes-and he was as circumspect as usual in all our meetings," said Sherlock, scowling. "The conclusion I told you was the most I could get out of him."

John started counting to ten, and only managed five.

"When did you start having these secret conferences?"

"Since the beginning; I couldn't talk to you because you were asleep most of the time and I prefer a responsive audience," said Sherlock defensively. "Our latest discussions have centreed on Moran. Speaking of which, I can't believe Sirius didn't think to ask Dumbledore about him."

John knew this was Sherlock's way of navigating out of the minefield he just stepped into. After considering the level of effort required for

pummeling him and keeping Benedict content at the same time, John decided to let it go.

"But you don't need to bother AD for that; your brother gave us a dossier," said John.

"At the cost of Sirius's soul," Sherlock muttered darkly. "It won't be long before Mycroft gets his claws on him."

"I'll recommend turning him into a pig permanently if it comes to that," said John dryly. "But I suppose you had to ask Dumbledore since we need to how competent of a wizard Moran is."

Sherlock nodded.

"I also wanted to understand what drove a wizard to join the Royal Marines," he said. "Most magicals opt to live in the Wizarding World, for the freedom to use magic if nothing else. But magicals who choose to dwell in our world are not uncommon. According to Arthur, about a quarter of the magical population marries Muggles, and these magicals usually choose to live in the Muggle World and hide their magic ability to maintain the Statute of Secrecy. But Moran is bachelor, so that can't be it."

"Maybe Moran got disillusioned by the magic world?" said John. "Moran is around our age. If he was a Muggle-born or a half-Blood, the blood supremacy wars of the eighties and nineties might've turned him off."

"Possible," said Sherlock. "I would've even said probable, if it weren't for the fact he's working for LV right now."

"But-"

"And his criminal history suggests he isn't driven by ideology," Sherlock went on. "Lately I've been thinking there was a more practical reason to the move."

"Like what?"

"I had assumed Moran was a generally competent magic user based on his ability to cast the Confundus Charm until I

remembered *Lockhart*," said Sherlock, saying the name like he was spitting out something foul. "Memory charms were Lockhart's specialty, and they are N.E.W.T. level spells just like the Confundus. How exactly an incompetent like Lockhart could manage those spells but not others, I have no idea. But he serves as an example that a person can specialize in one very advance spell, but be thoroughly unaccomplished in others."

"Oh, I see, so Moran could be untalented in magic *in general*, but have a few spells he can do really well," said John, nodding. "And he might've chosen to join the military after an unsuccessful stint at Hogwarts."

Sherlock nodded again.

"Dumbledore wasn't able to identify Moran based on his most current picture, but was able recall the student he might have been when I told him his name and age. The student came from a functionally Muggle family, had persistently low academic performance despite having a keen mind, failed to adjust to Hogwarts and the magic world, and left school in the middle of his sixth year after achieving only one O.W.L."

John smiled crookedly. "Sounds like a fairly typical military recruit, magic education aside. Now how exactly did he manage to convince the marines he didn't drop off the face of the earth for Hogwarts, I'd like to know…"

"Dumbledore mentioned the special arrangements he needs to make once in a blue moon for students such as he," said Sherlock. "But there we have it: a generally incompetent wizard who is inconveniently skilled in the Confundus Charm and possibly other spells, who is also a top-notch sniper."

"So glad to know he's very unlikely to kill us magically," said John sardonically. "So why did Moran have so much trouble with Magic? Does AD know?"

Sherlock's lips twisted into a smirk.

"Apparently Moran had problems with the logic."

John blinked. "… Come again?"

"You know how difficult it is to truly understand magic, John," said Sherlock seriously. "For instance, wizards have little problem accepting the idea that sex stops a wizard's magical growth or giving blood means giving life in a magically literal way. I, however, constantly stumble over these leaps. Isn't Love powerful magic? Why then does sex, a bodily act love according to most, stop a man's magic from growing? Also, blood is only *part* of what makes a life form-so, how can blood and blood *alone* account for Life in the magic realm?"

John said nothing.

"Obviously you need to accept magic on its own terms if you want to understand it," said Sherlock. "But if you persisted in treating it like a foreign thing-or you have no choice but to treat it as such-how can you?"

Then Sherlock gave John the Look-the one that said they both knew what was going on. It usually left John feeling deeply annoyed because she usually had no idea what Sherlock was hinting at. But this time John thought she could figure it out.

Sherlock had made a concentrated effort to study magic ever since they discovered its existence, and he'd succeed to an extent. But if John understood Sherlock correctly, he was right now admitting that he will never quite get it. It seemed absurd that he would reach this conclusion considering how well he was able to solve magical crime at first, but then John remembered those exasperated expressions their wizard friends would make, the " *you're thinking about it the wrong way!* " look they'd often donned whenever Sherlock interrogated them over magic. Sherlock's successes so far were thanks to his prodigious memory, ability to recall, and put together facts. This method worked well enough for crime that involved already known and well-understood magic, but the current case… it tread territory even the most learned wizards knew precious little. Stuff like how to remove magic from soul fragments, and exterminating wizards who literally tore their soul to multiple pieces and apparently could re-embody themselves after living as a disembodied half-spirit for over a decade. How can one navigate

such an uncertain terrain when one had enough trouble treading well-known roads?

"You… think we can't help Harry. Anymore," John whispered.

Sherlock nodded once.

"Even if this case resolves to our favour, it would only take one success-just one-for LV to return," said Sherlock sombrely. "Afterwards we will find Harry a dangerous person to be with. I'm not even convinced this case will end well for us, and I've come to this conclusion long before we learned about the potential leak. If I read the signs correctly, this case will end with either LV devoting his energies to destroy us or the Ministry of Magic doing the honours. I certainly don't recommend further involvement with the wizarding world."

They stared at each other again. For many heartbeats one could only hear the gurgling noises Benedict was making around his fist and the patter of soft footsteps outside the flat.

At length Sherlock knelt before John, and the two clasped hands.

"I don't regret discovering magic any more than I regret our children," Sherlock declared.

"Good," said John shakily. "Because if you think you can convince me to bow out of Harry's life, then you're about to get very disappointed."

"I know better than that," said Sherlock, smiling wryly. "But the fact remains we can't continue the same way."

"True enough. So how are things going to change?"

"Of late I've been tempted to look into problems furnished by nature rather than those responsible by man," said Sherlock as he reached out to Benedict, who was still trying to eat his fist. "Should I make the transition, your blog will have to come to an end. Might as well end it when the case regarding one of the most dangerous and capable wizards in recent history concludes."

"Sounds good to me," said John. "So what is the plan?"

"I'm going to consult Jason Shin," said Sherlock, giving John another Look. "Sirius is quite capable as a general utility man, but for horticulture, I need Jason's expertise. Just think about his greenhouses."

John blinked as the Joker Grin spread across Sherlock's face.

"I want something like that," said Sherlock cryptically.

Final Notes : no matter how I twisted the plot around, sparing no character deaths, in the end Sherlock came to the conclusion he had to bow out of the magic world. I really didn't want to do it, but saw no way out. This doesn't mean ASIM is coming to an end! Sherlock may be ready bow out of the Wizarding World, but the Wizarding World isn't finished with him and John. So stay tuned…

Liebesleid (Love's Sorrow) was composed by Frantz Kreisler at an unknown date; it was published in 1905. ***Siciliano*** is the third movement of Sonata No. 1 (BWV 1001) by Johann Sebastian Bach. Rita only got the titles right (that shouldn't surprise anyone, of course). The 'Scottish ballad' is *Bovaglie's Plaid*, composed by James Scott Skinner, originally for the harp according to Google. I had the violin version as played by Mairead Nesbitt in mind.

Cross Examination

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Five: Cross Examination

Harry never thought something could possibly ruin the day Remus received the werewolf cure, but that was before he saw Ron and Hermione's faces after he and Julia were portkeyed back to Hogwarts, right inside the Music Room. Harry felt his insides turn to ice when Ron told him Luna Lovegood eavesdropped into Hermione's flute lessons without either of them noticing, and how this made them think there was a potential leak.

"… You're taking this very well," said Julia, after several stunned seconds.

Harry said nothing-couldn't, because the news had sent him into a state of wild panic. All he could think was that it was *over*, the agent succeeded and that he'd failed in the worst way possible.

"We need to tell Dumbledore," said Hermione urgently. "Harry, you know where his office is, don't you?"

"Yeah," croaked Harry in a voice unlike his normal one. "Yeah, I've been there twice."

"Good. Take us there, Harry."

Harry led Ron, Hermione and Julia to the stone gargoyle that served as the entrance to the headmaster's office. There they spent five minutes calling out the names of different sweets because Harry didn't know the password and it wasn't Cockroach Clusters. The gargoyle finally stepped aside when Ron shouted: ' *Acid Pops* !' between horrible swear words. They rode the revolving staircase inside and let out a collective sigh of relief when they saw the dim light shining on the bottom of the oak doors-Albus Dumbledore was still awake.

Hermione told Dumbledore their concerns after he invited them in. Harry hung back while Hermione talked. The low lights inside the office cast deep shadows on all occupants and objects, and as he studied Dumbledore's calm but sombre countenance, it struck Harry suddenly how very old he was looking. He knew, of course, that Dumbledore was getting on in years, but somehow he never really thought of Dumbledore as an old man.

The lines on Dumbledore's ancient face seemed much deeper when Hermione finished speaking.

"Thank you very much for alerting me," said Dumbledore gravely. "You did the right thing to tell me your suspicions as soon as possible."

"What are we to do, Professor?" asked Hermione anxiously.

"Sherlock needs to be informed," said Dumbledore. "Please contact him at the earliest opportunity, but only after you have found a secure place to make the call. I myself will inform him of the potential leak, but he will undoubtedly want more details from you directly."

Harry no more looked forward to this than he looked forward to seeing Sherlock's reaction to the news.

"I will also advise you to set aside any feelings of failure and continue your efforts to uncover the agent," said Dumbledore.

"But the agent might know how close we are in figuring him out!" said Ron. "Doesn't that change *everything* ?"

"The investigation must continue nevertheless," said Dumbledore firmly. "The agent may know everything you have discussed, this is true. But what exactly would the agent know from your meetings? We must also consider how the agent and Lord Voldemort-" Ron flinched "-would react to the information they have gained.

"Let suppose for the moment the agent had overheard *all* of your meetings," Dumbledore began. "If he did, he would know you were searching for anyone who has the wrong name for their physical body through an enchanted map. He would also know we were collecting fluid or tissue samples of the Ministry workers involved in the Triwizard Tournament, particularly Misters Bagman and Crouch."

"How did you-"

"Mr. Lestrade was not the only person Sherlock asked to obtain these things for him," said Dumbledore quietly. "I trust you know that we were able to collect hair and saliva samples of Mr. Crouch and Mr. Bagman at the Ministry of Magic and the Yule Ball, and that the DNA profile of Mr. Crouch at the Ministry differed from the DNA profile of Mr. Crouch present at the Yule Ball. If the agent knew we were trying to profile his DNA, why did he not take preventive measures? Mr. Crouch could've easily refused the tea Mr. Lestrade offered. He also could've excused himself from the Yule Ball, where one cannot help but eat and drink to avoid suspicion."

"He didn't know," said Harry, his insides thawing a bit. "At least, didn't know enough about DNA to stop us…"

"Precisely," said Dumbledore, nodding at Harry in approval. "As you rightly reasoned, we can conclude either the agent has not eavesdropped into your meetings, at least not until after the Yule Ball, or he *did* eavesdrop, but didn't have the necessary knowledge or help that would allow him to understand what you were talking about. Either case is to our advantage."

The four of them nodded.

"Now let us suppose the agent has eavesdropped into your meetings after the Yule Ball," Dumbledore continued. "That would

mean he has gained access to Hogwarts, the Music Room in particular. If so, it is highly unlikely the agent would've failed to notice you are brewing the Polyjuice potion there. Would he not suspect you have figured out how he is infiltrating Hogwarts and sabotage your brewing efforts? Would not Lord Voldemort," (Ron flinched again), "react to the news with terrible anger? Harry's previous visions of Voldemort occurred when Voldemort's emotions were at height. Thus we can expect Harry to have a third vision if he were angry. But there have been no visions since the Champion selection. The agent of course may have chosen to hide this information from his master, but he would still need to change tactics in order to succeed. That the agent needs to change tactics at all would indicate to Voldemort things are not going according to plan, and you know how he reacted the last time things did not go according to plan."

"He was absolutely thrilled," muttered Harry and Julia shivered.

"Quite so," said Dumbledore. "Of course, the agent may have conceived a suitable alternative shortly after he discovered your Polyjuice brewing efforts, thus preventing Lord Voldemort from getting too angry. However, I imagine Voldemort would be absolutely irate if he learned a Muggle was instrumental in dismantling his plans."

"It would definitely piss him off," said Ron, and Hermione nodded fervently.

"Indeed," said Dumbledore, smiling. "So this is my assessment of the situation: the agent may have eavesdropped into your meetings, but evidence suggests he has not overheard anything important. Therefore the investigation may continue, but you must take measures that will ensure your meetings are truly secret. Do you accept this?"

"Yes, Professor," said the four of them.

"Good," said Dumbledore, nodding again. "Now your first task should be obvious to you."

"Find somewhere we can hold private meetings," said Julia. "Or find

a way to make a room private."

"Do you know a good place, Professor?" Hermione asked. "You know everything about Hogwarts…"

"Oh, I would never claim knowing everything about Hogwarts," said Dumbledore. "Only a month ago, for instance, I took a wrong turning on the way to the bathroom and found myself in a beautifully proportioned room I have never seen before, containing a really rather magnificent collection of chamber pots. When I went back to investigate more closely, I discovered that the room had vanished. I'm still keeping an eye for it. Possibly it is only accessible at five-thirty in the morning. Or it may only appear at the full moon-or when the seeker has an exceptionally full bladder."

Ron and Julia snorted. Hermione frowned, but Harry could've sworn Dumbledore gave them a small wink.

"But to return to the subject of soundproofing and security, the normal practice is to use the Imperturbable charm," said Dumbledore. "But this would require you to learn the charm, and the fact you are learning the charm at all would alert the agent that you are aware of his activities. The charm itself is not unbreakable, and without definite knowledge on how the agent may be eavesdropping on you, it would be unadvisable to rely on it. So I suggest you ask the House-elves in the kitchens for a suitable place. Their knowledge of this castle is quite extraordinary, as one can expect from those who care for it daily."

"Yes, professor," said Hermione promptly.

"Excellent," said Dumbledore. "Now I have only two more things to say to you, and afterwards you may go and inform Sherlock to his heart's content."

The four of them waited for Dumbledore to speak breathlessly.

"First, it is vital that you understand the importance of discovering the agent," said Dumbledore. "And by discover, I mean obtaining evidence that shows who exactly he is. You may not be aware of this, but the Ministry is reluctant to consider the possibility that

Pettigrew and the agent may be working to bring Lord Voldemort back."

"Why would they think that?" said Ron incredulously after shuddering at Voldemort's name. "What else could they be doing?"

"You must think from the Ministry's perspective," said Dumbledore quietly. "The investigation itself started because we have access to information they do not have. I am speaking, of course, of Harry's visions. Also, unlike our friends at the Ministry, many of whom neither knows nor cares much about the Muggle world, we are using Muggle technology and science to gather intelligence. So it is not surprising the Ministry holds a different position."

Hermione bit her lip.

"The Ministry believes the agent and Pettigrew are using all their energies in hiding and running away," said Dumbledore. "This certainly explains the Ministry's continued failure to capture them. But it does not explain the disappearance of Bertha Jorkins in the place Lord Voldemort was last known to be, the sudden increase in wizards engaged in Muggle crime, and the murder of Frank Bryce following their escape. I have tried to convince the Minister of Magic that all four cases are linked, but he disagrees."

Harry swallowed.

"There is, however, a bit of hope," said Dumbledore. "The Ministry does not deny the agent exists. As long as we can agree on this, we can hope to convince the Ministry of what Lord Voldemort is doing."

"We just need to find him," said Harry hollowly.

"Yes," said Dumbledore, nodding. "Now my second point: I know some of you, seeing how lucky we have been, may feel tempted to push that luck and confront the agent yourself," (Ron's ears went red) "or seeing how you blundered in this one area, are tempted to turn too cautious and do nothing until you have covered every contingency," (Hermione flushed.) "So my advice is to resist either extreme. Both action and caution have their value, but it does not do well to focus on one at the expense of the other. Please remember

that."

Dumbledore stood up. Sensing the meeting was over, Harry rose too, and so did his friends. But before they left, Dumbledore said one last thing:

"I have full confidence in all of you. Just do your best."

The hallway outside Dumbledore's office was empty by the time Harry, Ron, Hermione and Julia left it. Harry checked his watch and was startled at how late it was.

"So what do we do now? Go to the kitchens?" said Ron.

"Shhhh!" Hermione hissed. "We're out in the open! Who knows who might be hearing?"

Ron quickly shut his mouth.

"Are you sure you want to go to the kitchens?" asked Julia in a low voice. "It's not exactly secret. Almost everyone in my house knows where it is because of the First Task party…"

Hermione bit her lip briefly before her expression cleared.

"We don't need go to the kitchens to talk to the elves," she whispered. "Dobby and Blippy usually shows up when Harry calls them."

"But he still needs to be somewhere no one can hear him before he asks," said Julia. "Damn, it's catch-22…"

"Catch, *what* ?" said Ron, bewildered.

"Never mind," said Hermione quickly. She whispered something into Ron's ear first, then Julia, and finally grabbed Harry by the ear and whispered: "Get a noise-cancelling paper charm and call them inside your four-poster. I told Ron to be on the lookout and Julia to standby. That's the best we can do for now."

Julia returned to the Hufflepuff Basement and Harry, Ron and Hermione the Gryffindor tower after this. When Harry, Ron and Hermione climbed through the portrait hole, they found the common room empty except for Ginny and Neville, who were sitting in the armchairs by the fireplace.

"You two go up, I'll tell them," said Hermione, much to Ginny and Neville's obvious confusion.

Harry and Ron ran up to their dormitory. Dean and Seamus, to their relief, were fast asleep. Ron took out his wand and stood menacingly at the foot of Harry's bed, and Harry drew the curtains of his four-poster around him and attached a noise-cancelling paper charm on the fabric.

Harry was about to call Blippy and Dobby when a thought made him pause for a second. He wasn't sure if he should call both Dobby and Blippy. All the times he'd seen them together, they kept trying to one-up the other for some reason. He was probably better off calling just one. But which of the two should he call?

After some consideration, Harry decided to flip a coin. The knut he tossed came up heads.

"Dobby?" he called out.

Immediately there was a loud crack.

"Harry Potter, sir!"

Dobby the house-elf was standing on top of his bed. As he sank into a deep bow so low that his pencil-like nose brushed the blanket, Harry couldn't help but notice the elf was wearing Benedict's old baby bear vest, an outfit Sherlock despised, and all of the hats Mrs. Hudson knitted for Benedict piled one on top of the other, with the one that looked like a stuffed orangutan on the very top. On his feet were John's hideous Christmas socks from the past five years.

"Er… are you wearing all the clothes John and Sherlock's been giving you?" asked Harry.

"Oh no, sir," said Dobby happily. "Dobby has been taking some for

Winky, too, sir."

"Yeah, how is Winky?"

Dobby's ears drooped slightly.

"Winky is drinking lots again, sir," he said sadly, his enormous round green eyes, large as tennis balls, downcast. "She is feeling discouraged, sir, of ever doing well enough to get Mr. Lestrade's approval. It has been over two months and Mr. Lestrade has not said anything about Mr. Crouch."

"I'll talk to him," said Harry.

"That would be most kind of you, sir!" said Dobby as he sank into a deep bow again. "Harry Potter is always so kind and thoughtful! Winky will surely be happy when she is hearing the news! Ah, if only Happy Potter were happy also!" Dobby went on, straightening up again and looking timidly at Harry. "Dobby is thinking Harry Potter is very troubled. Dobby also thinks Mr. Sherlock is troubled too, for when Dobby goes to 221B, Mr. Sherlock is always marching up and down, up and down, in the living room with his Thinking face."

"There's been a lot going on," Harry murmured.

The elf surveyed Harry out of his vast, orb-like eyes. Then he said very seriously, his ears drooping, "Dobby wishes he could help Harry Potter, for Harry Potter set Dobby free and Dobby is much, much happier now."

Harry stared at him for a moment. Then he smiled.

"There is something you can do for me, Dobby," said Harry.

The elf beamed.

"Name it, Harry Potter, sir!"

"I need to find a place where six people can hold meetings without being overheard or discovered by anyone. *Especially*," Harry clenched his fists, "outsiders. But I still need to be able to call Sherlock."

Harry half-expected the elf's smile to vanish, his ears to droop; he expected him to say it was impossible, or else that he would try to find somewhere. He did not expect Dobby to give a little skip, his ears waggling cheerfully, and clap his hands together.

"Dobby knows the perfect place, sir!" he said happily. "Dobby heard tell of it from the other house-elves when he came to Hogwarts, sir. It is known by us as the Come and Go Room, sir, or else as the Room of Requirement!"

"Why?" Harry said curiously.

"Because it is a room that a person can only enter when they have real need of it," said Dobby seriously. "Sometimes it is there, and sometimes it is not, but when it appears, it is always equipped for the seeker's needs. Dobby has used it, sir," said the elf, dropping his voice and looking guilty, "when Winky has been very drunk; he has hidden her in the Room of Requirement and he has found antidotes to Butterbeer there, and a nice elf-sized bed to settle her on while she sleeps it off, sir. Dobby knows Mr. Filch has found extra cleaning materials there when he has run short, sir. And-"

"-if you really needed a bathroom," said Harry, remembering what Dumbledore had said minutes ago, "would it fill itself with chamber pots?"

"Dobby expects so, sir," said Dobby, nodding earnestly. "It is a most amazing room, sir."

"How many people know about it?" said Harry.

"Very few, sir. Mostly people stumbles across it when they needs it, sir, but often they never finds it again, for they do not know that it is always there waiting to be called into service, sir."

"It sounds brilliant," said Harry, his heart racing. "It sounds perfect, Dobby. When can you show me where it is?"

"Any time, Harry Potter, sir," said Dobby, looking delighted at Harry's enthusiasm. "We could go now, if you like!"

For a moment Harry was tempted to go with Dobby. He was halfway

out of his bed, intending to pull out his Invisibility Cloak, when a voice very much like Dumbledore's whispered in his ear: *don't push your luck*

"Not now, Dobby," said Harry reluctantly, sinking back into his bed. "This is really important… I don't want to blow it, it'll need proper planning. Listen, can you just tell me exactly where this Room of Requirement is, and how to get in there?"

Harry drew the curtains back after thanking Dobby and the elf returned to the kitchens. He and Ron dashed back to the empty common room, where Hermione, Neville and Ginny were waiting for them. Harry could tell from Neville and Ginny's grave expressions they knew what was at stake.

"You should've called Blippy," said Hermione when Harry told them about the Room of Requirement.

"Why?" Harry said defensively.

"Well… it's just that Dobby's plans aren't always that safe. Don't you remember when he lost you all the bones in your arm?"

"This room isn't just some mad idea of Dobby's, and it's the other house-elves who told him about it."

Hermione's expression cleared.

"The other elves use this room?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, well, that's all right then," said Hermione. "Now we just have to text Sherlock and Julia about the meeting."

"When should we meet?"

"Five o' clock in the morning; four thirty is the earliest we can leave the tower, and we need travel time."

Harry sent a text to Julia as soon as he finished texting Sherlock.

Meeting tomorrow 5AM at the seventh floor opposite to the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy being clubbed by trolls

Julia replied within seconds:

Ok

Sherlock didn't reply until four thirty in the morning, and by then Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville and Ginny were all fast asleep. Harry was the first to wake up because Sherlock called him after sending a multitude texts. After confirming the meeting time, Harry texted Julia a reminder and she replied: *Am already at the seventh floor.* Wondering if Julia slept at all, Harry shook Ron, Hermione, Neville and Ginny awake.

At twenty minutes before five o' clock, Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville and Ginny left the Gryffindor common room, Harry clutching a certain piece of aged parchment in his hand. Though curfew had ended, all five of them kept looking around nervously as they made their way along the seventh floor.

"Hold it, one last check," warned Harry, unfolding the piece of parchment at the top of the last staircase, tapping it with his wand and muttering, " *I solemnly swear that I am up to no good* ."

A map of Hogwarts appeared on the blank surface of the parchment. Tiny black dots, labeled with names, showed where various people were.

"Filch and Mrs. Norris are on the second floor," said Harry, holding the map close to his eyes. "All of the teachers are in their offices."

"What about the ghosts?" Hermione said anxiously.

"None floating about the seventh floor," said Harry. "Okay, let's go."

They hurried along the corridor to the place Dobby had described to Harry, a stretch of blank wall opposite an enormous tapestry depicting Barnabas the Barmy's foolish attempt to train trolls for the ballet. As promised, Julia was waiting for them there.

"Okay," said Harry quietly, while a moth-eaten troll paused in his relentless clubbing of the would-be ballet teacher to watch them. "Dobby said to walk past this bit of wall three times, concentrating hard on what we need."

They did so, turning sharply at the window just beyond the blank wall, then at the man-sized vase on its other side. Ron and Ginny had screwed up their eyes in concentration; Hermione was whispering something under her breath; Julia kept glaring at the wall; Neville made straining noises and his red face made it look like he was trying to lay a Quaffle-sized egg; Harry's fists were clenched as he stared ahead of him.

We need somewhere to hold a secret meeting… he thought. *Just give us a place where no one can overhear us or find us… somewhere we can talk to Sherlock in secret…*

"Harry!" said Hermione sharply, as they wheeled around after their third walk past.

A highly polished door had appeared in the wall. Ron and Neville were staring at it, looking slightly wary. Harry reached out, seized the brass handle, pulled open the door and led the way into a spacious room lit with flickering torches like those that illuminated the dungeons eight floors below.

The walls were lined with wooden bookcases and there were comfortable-looking chairs surrounding an oval-shaped mahogany table in the centre. A set of shelves at the far end of the room had several drawers and held a range of curious instruments such as giant Sneakoscopes, stuff that looked like extra-squiggly, golden television aerials that hummed slightly, and what appeared to be a large mirror except it wasn't reflecting the room, but had shadowy figures that were moving around inside it, none of them clearly in focus. A mirror that did reflect the room was hanging on a wall next to wheeled blackboard, and it looked identical to the mirror that hung above 221B's mantelpiece.

"Look at all this space," said Ron enthusiastically as he drew a chair. "We can actually sit down!"

"And just look at these books!" said Hermione excitedly, running a finger along the spines of the large leather-bound tomes. "*Enchanted Counterintelligence… From the Symposium of Magical Security… Dropping Eaves on the Eavesdropper*… wow…" She looked around at Harry, her face glowing. "Harry, this is wonderful, there's everything we need here!"

They explored the room some more as Hermione slid *Nocebos for the Nosy* from its shelf, sank on to the nearest chair and began to read. Julia moved across to the door and turned the key protruding from the lock; it clicked in a satisfyingly loud way. Ginny examined the drawers and found rolls of parchment, quills and ink bottles. Harry stood in front of the reflecting mirror. For several moments, all it did was display his reflection.

Then the mirror-Harry winked, turned around and walked to the door. The mirror's surface turned grey and opaque when the door shut behind it. Then on the next blink, Harry was looking into the interior of 221B's living room.

"I know what that is," said Julia while Harry gaped in astonishment. "It's a two-way mirror."

"What does it do?" Harry asked.

"It lets you talk to the person who has the companion mirror," said Julia. "It's like video conferencing except magic."

"How do you know this?"

"Uncle Jason felt bad he never got my Owl asking for a snake two years ago, so he got me one for Christmas."

Harry snorted as he recalled their effort to see if Draco Malfoy was a Parselmouth. The barn owl they used to send the letter to Mr. Jason returned to Hogwarts about a month after the whole fiasco was over, looking grimy and exhausted with many of its feathers sticking out in different directions. The owl took flight whenever Harry and his friends entered the Owlry since then, apparently afraid that they would send it on a similarly grueling errand.

Harry told Sherlock via text to stand in front of the mirror at the mantelpiece. It wasn't long before a tousled-haired Sherlock walked into view. Harry was so fascinated by the enchantment, the fact Sherlock looked tired and was still wearing sleepwear barely registered.

"Intriguing," said Sherlock in a deep voice as he looked at Harry from the other side of the glass. "I didn't know this mirror was connected to another one."

"Sorry to wake you up," said Harry.

Sherlock made a dismissive gesture. "So you called me. What is it?"

Ron and Hermione quickly joined Harry at the mirror told Sherlock all about Luna, their suspicions that the agent may have overheard them, and what Dumbledore told them. Though Sherlock didn't speak, let alone yell, and the only sign of what was going inside his head was the little frown that wrinkled his eyebrows, Harry had a feeling the news was making Sherlock enormously furious. Hermione must have noticed this, too, because she quickly became very nervous and despondent.

Sherlock remained silent when Hermione finished speaking. He walked up and down the living room a few times. Then he stopped in front of the mantelpiece, lifted the skull and pulled out a small cardboard box from underneath it.

"What's that?" Ron asked nervously.

"Nicotine patch," said Sherlock. "Helps me think."

"You, um, took out three," said Hermione as Sherlock slapped a patch onto his forearm.

"This is a three patch problem," said Sherlock. "Now don't talk to me for the next fifty minutes."

The six of them waited while Sherlock presumably thought; they didn't know what he was doing for sure, as the mirror went to back reflecting the Room of Requirement when they moved away from it. Ginny tried to comfort them by reminding them Dumbledore's

reasoning, but Harry, who knew Sherlock better than most, knew that his brooding silences were often a sign that a case was going badly.

Harry didn't know when the six of them dosed off, but they woke up when a loud rattling noise came from the mirror. Everyone scrambled to stand in front of it. Sherlock appeared in due time, and as soon as he started talking, whatever relief Harry got from the meeting with Dumbledore vanished.

Sherlock disagreed with Dumbledore's assessment that their investigation could continue as usual. He argued Dumbledore's reasoning failed to account all the possible players in Voldemort's scheme, like the military wizard Moran and Rita Skeeter (a name none of them expected), and was biased towards the most optimistic interpretation of the given data (i.e. Voldemort will fail to keep his anger in check and would know if the agent is hiding things from him). Rather than give into optimism, he said, they should consider the more realistic/pessimistic scenario: Voldemort knew his plan wasn't working, thus would attempt to gain his objective through alternative methods. Therefore they should focus on figuring out why exactly LV wanted to kidnap Harry, so they could place preventive measures accordingly.

"But we still need to find the agent!" Hermione protested. "He needs to be caught!"

"Yes, but the leak has rendered many of our conclusions about him obsolete," said Sherlock tersely. "We need fresh data and we only have ten days to get it. I am by no means thinking we cannot uncover the agent, but to assume we can is the height of foolishness. The only good thing I can say of this situation is that the agent is just as pressed in time as we are."

The mirror went back to reflecting its surroundings after Sherlock ordered them to start researching LV's goals and motives. A heavy silence fell on the room in its wake. All of them were thinking the same thing: *Who was right?*

"They can't be both right," said Ron flatly. "I reckon they're both off. I mean, Sherlock's brilliant and all, but he's not a wizard.

Dumbledore's brilliant too, but he can't be right all the time."

"I think we should listen to Dumbledore," said Hermione. "I do think Sherlock has a point, but Dumbledore understands You-Know-Who better. He led the resistance against You-Know-Who when he was powerful the last time, so he knows how he works and how he reacts to stuff." She paused. "And didn't you think Sherlock was a bit… *slower* today? I mean," she added quickly at Harry's furious look, "he must have trouble sleeping because of Benedict, and that's really not his fault, but you know lack of sleep impairs thinking and-"

"You're right Dumbledore understands You-Know-Who better," said Julia, interrupting. "But I find Sherlock is more accurate when it comes to *criminals* . He never thinks the best of them, and in this case, you really shouldn't."

"But we're dealing with You-Know-Who, not just any criminal!" Hermione argued. "He's the mastermind behind it all! Don't you think we should trust the person who knows him the best?"

"I don't doubt Dumbledore's assessment; I just think Sherlock has the better counter-strategy," said Julia, frowning.

"Isn't that the same thing as saying you think Sherlock is more right?" said Ron.

Harry remained silent while Ron, Hermione and Julia argued. In his mind, the problem was both Dumbledore and Sherlock sounded *equally* right. He was used to the idea of Sherlock being right and Dumbledore just knowing things. It never occurred to him he would face a situation where the two people whose brains he trusted the most would disagree.

"What do you think, Harry?"

The question jerked Harry out of his thoughts. He looked up and found Ron, Hermione, Julia, Neville and Ginny looking at him expectantly. It took Harry a many blinks to realise what they were thinking.

"Why are you asking me?" he sputtered.

"You must have an idea what we should do," said Ginny. "You're pretty good at deductions."

"I don't remember doing any deductions for this case!"

"Yes, you did. You noticed the significance of Winky being dismissed on Boxing day," said Hermione.

"And how that relates to Pettigrew," Julia added.

"And if you want non-case examples, we have two," said Ron. "You figured out Hogwarts is hosting an inter-school competition in the train and what the Second task is."

"Those were just pat deductions!" cried Harry in frustration. "They're not on the same scale as this!"

"That's okay," said Neville. "We just want to know how we're supposed to help. You can figure that out, right?"

Harry stopped. Then he took in several deep breaths. Yes, this… this was something he could do. Maybe. Possibly. He was afraid to think, as the memory of his failure to keep the case secret like John told him to was still painfully fresh in his mind.

"… Okay," said Harry slowly, but thinking as hard as he could. "Let's go over the stuff both Sherlock and Dumbledore agree on… the stuff we need to get more evidence for."

"I'll write it down," said Hermione. Then she ran over to the blackboard and picked up a chalk.

"One: the agent has no idea how badly he's failing," said Harry.

"True that," said Ron. "Sherlock said Dumbledore got that right."

Harry nodded. "Two: *Voldemort* doesn't know badly his plan is failing, but this can change."

Hermione made an agreeing noise as she wrote this down.

"Three: the agent is probably Barty Crouch's son."

Ron, Ginny and Neville did a double-take.

"… I forgot about that," said Ron. "But that's probably true, right? I wonder why Dumbledore didn't mention it."

"Probably thought he didn't have to," said Harry. "That's Sherlock's biggest beef against Dumbledore: he doesn't tell you *everything*, just the stuff he thinks you need to know at the moment."

"He just wants us to figure it out on our own," said Hermione. "It's not like Sherlock can't."

"You try dealing with him when he knows someone's keeping data away from him," Harry muttered. "Anyway, items four and five are the agent was using Polyjuice to enter Hogwarts, and Voldemort wants to kidnap me. Anything else you want to add?"

"Six: Winky got sacked because of the agent," said Hermione angrily as she wrote everything down with such force that the chalk was breaking a bit with each stroke. "Oh, this makes me even angrier! If the agent is Crouch is son, then of course she'd be responsible for him! I bet Crouch made her do all the work after smuggling him home… then the son up and betrays her too! The nerve of them!"

"You leave off on that elf," said Ron irritably, while Neville looked down.

"No, you shut it," snapped Ginny. "Winky's important. Harry would've never noticed something was wrong if it weren't for her."

"But we already know about her for sure! There are no question marks about it! So why put her up on the board?"

Julia studied the list while Hermione, Ron and Ginny bickered. She looked pensive.

"Why would LV want to kidnap Harry?" said Julia, making the bickering trio pause. "Why is that necessary? What merit does it have?"

"Maybe he wanted to start his reign of terror with a bang," said Harry darkly. "Sending my dead body to Hogwarts would definitely do the

trick…"

"That's not funny!" said Hermione, looking stricken. "Don't joke about stuff like that!"

"It wasn't a joke," snapped Harry.

"But if he wanted to make a statement, why would he try to kidnap you on the sly?" said Julia. "He tried to distract everyone with the dragon and used a secret portkey. Doesn't that mean he didn't want to make a big show out of it, at least until it was too late?" She paused. "Come to think of it, why hasn't he done anything else besides gathering money for his comeback? Shouldn't he be gathering his old followers or some such?"

"Aren't most of them in prison?" said Ginny.

"Not all of them," said Hermione. "Quite a few managed to keep themselves out. The Malfoys, for example."

"D'you reckon You-Know-Who contacted Lucius Malfoy?" said Ron quickly. "If he did, I'm going to tell Dad. He could catch him in the act!"

"I don't think Malfoy has any idea," said Julia thoughtfully. "He wouldn't have resisted the chance to rub it in our face if he did."

"But if his father didn't tell him…"

"This is just speculation," said Harry. "Maybe LV did. Maybe he didn't. *I* wouldn't, if I were him. Lucius Malfoy doesn't strike me as the type to do something unless there's a big return of investment. But he's not our main problem. Let's focus on the list."

There was a long pause while everyone thought it over.

"I see what you're saying," said Hermione to Julia. "Right now You-Know-Who is relying on his most loyal follower and no one else. Meaning he can't afford to bring in anyone who's loyalty is iffy to his scheme. Pettigrew doesn't count because he has everything to lose if he goes against You-Know-Who and Moran doesn't count either because he's terrible wizard and a wanted one at that. But what

does this mean?"

"It means Voldemort isn't powerful enough!" said Harry excitedly, as everything clicked. "Yes, I see it now! He didn't have a body, remember, for the last twelve years! Now he might have something minimal enough to hold a wand, but it probably doesn't look very impressive! You can't lead a terrorist organization with just scary monologues and death- you need to look the part! Voldemort needs a body that's scary enough and powerful enough to really return! But what would he need to make something like that?"

Ron, Hermione, Neville and Ginny stared at him blankly.

"Magic-lots of powerful magic! Oh, c'mon, you know this!" said Harry, leaping to his feet and pacing. "You're custom designing your own body! You want to make sure it's the most powerful body you can get your hands on! So you collect powerful magical substances like, I don't know, unicorn blood and dragon hide! Then you remember there is a person who made you lose your old body, at least you think you know who this person is, and you want to make sure you have the magic that allowed him to do it! *How can you get hold of this magic and make it yours?* "

"… Get his blood," Julia gasped. "Sonofabitch, he wants-"

"-my blood," said Harry grimly. "He's after my *blood* ."

Final Notes : The kids, particularly Harry, grow up. I feel like a proud parent. You should have all the data needed to figure out the solution. Can you guess?

ETA: fixed some number problems.

Clue Overlooked

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Six: Clue Overlooked

Only an hour had passed since the sun rose on the morning Harry deduced Lord Voldemort's objective, but by then Harry was no longer in Hogwarts. Instead he was inside 221B Baker Street getting his hair and attire inspected by Sherlock Holmes. Outside the flat, parked next to the curb, was an obtrusively bland-looking black car.

"Do we really have to visit to him?" Harry asked as he pulled a face at his brown pinstripe suit and blue shirt.

"Time is of the essence and we need his advice," Sherlock replied as he shook his head at Harry's white converses.

"What can he tell me that you can't?" said Harry petulantly.

Sherlock smirked. "In terms of the investigation, nothing much; but for the Muggle-Magic relations involved, we need his political acumen."

Eventually Sherlock and Harry left the flat wearing their winter coats. The driver of the black car opened the right-side door to the backseat as soon as the two set their feet on the pavement. Sherlock and Harry boarded the car, and the driver started to drive

as soon as he was back behind the stearing-wheel.

They quietly drove through London. No one talked. Eventually the driver brought the car to a smooth stop in front of the offices for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Sherlock and Harry got out, and didn't give their driver a backwards glance as he drove the car away. Sherlock marched inside the building first, and Harry followed him.

Harry quickly lost his sense of direction as Sherlock led him through several hallways. He passed a few suited people on the way. None of them seemed to take much notice of him or Sherlock.

Sherlock stopped inside a dark and austerely furnished office. Harry nervously sank into the chair placed in front of the unoccupied desk and Sherlock stood behind him. Neither of them spoke as they waited. Harry tried not to knead the front of his suit out of nervousness.

Thankfully, he didn't have to wait for long. Mycroft Holmes entered the office in a few short minutes.

"Sherlock and Harry," Mycroft said blandly as he shut the door behind him. "How nice. So how may I help you?"

Harry waited for Mycroft sit down, and wet his lips before speaking.

"I, um, need some advice," said Harry hesitantly.

Mycroft left eyebrow quirked up, "Really?"

Harry nodded, "On terrorists."

"Ah," said Mycroft softly-and knowingly. "What is the situation?"

"We know what the leader is after," said Harry carefully. "It's just… *hard* to stop him from getting it."

"How important is this thing?" Mycroft asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" Sherlock replied.

"Vital?" said Mycroft shrewdly.

"Can't return without it," Sherlock confirmed.

Mycroft's grey eyes glinted.

"This isn't a lot to go on," he remarked.

Harry remained still and silent. After studying him for a few seconds, Mycroft smiled. It was not a nice smile.

"Here is some insider information to facilitate our discussion," Mycroft began. "Elected officials do not actually run the government. None of them are in office long enough to understand all of its intricacies to properly run it. Thus they are at the mercy of advisors such as yours truly for decision making and policy execution. Their standing is also dependent on popular approval. This, coupled with the short-term nature of their tenure, makes satisfying the current desires of his or her constituents the greatest priority to all elected officials. Even the finest political leaders are not exempt. Speaking of," he eyed Harry beadily, "what kind of person is your current leader? Is he preemptive and thoughtful in his policy-making? Does he surround himself with good advisors? Do you picture him doing the 'right thing' even if it results in unpopularity?"

Harry looked down. He couldn't picture the current Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, doing any of the things Mycroft mentioned.

"I thought as much," said Mycroft. "This makes advising a bit easier."

Harry kept his silence.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said Mycroft, in a manner that said he highly doubted he would require correction, "But your presence here tells me the terrorist leader who led the previous reign of terror is staging a comeback, but the current government officials are oblivious or in denial of his activities. How much of an obstruction this is does not matter at this point-those who *are* aware of the situation do not have the resources to prevent the leader from obtaining his objective, and he is closer to achieving his goal than you can care to admit."

Harry couldn't help but swallow.

"My advice, then, is obvious," Mycroft said. "If you can't stop him, let him. Only control how and when he gets his prized objective. That way you can ensure he is placed at a great disadvantage."

"I'd rather him not," Harry mumbled. "If he succeeds, he'll murder so many people…"

"Death is inevitable," said Mycroft phlegmatically. "It's only a matter of when and how."

Harry clawed at his thighs as he tried to keep his temper in check. *It's easy for you to say*, he thought angrily. *You're not the one whose life is on the line…*

"I will have you know that my life is *always* on the line," said Mycroft, correctly deducing Harry's thoughts. "But that is irrelevant. You are here for my advice, and gave it to you. Take it or leave it."

Harry glared at Mycroft mutinously. He only succeeded in making Mycroft put on his reptilian smile again.

"You are just like your mother," drawled Mycroft. "My advice is not as objectionable as you think it is. Perhaps if I further advised you on *how* you can put your enemy at a disadvantage, it would be more palatable. But for that I will have to know what the leader wants to accomplish after his return."

"He wants to live forever," said Sherlock before Harry could say anything.

"He seeks immortality?" said Mycroft, eyebrow raised.

"As well as omnipotence," said Sherlock, shrugging his shoulders. "We might as well say he wants to be a *god* ."

Mycroft snorted disdainfully, "How unimaginative."

"It's nothing to laugh at!" said Harry furiously. "You have no idea what he did in order to get as close as he can!"

"Indeed I do not," said Mycroft, looking amused. "That's the whole point of your world's secrecy, isn't it?"

Harry balled his fists.

"I suppose the power you and your kind possess make the goal look more, shall I say, *obtainable*," Mycroft went on.

"But still fundamentally flawed," said Sherlock scornfully. "Even if mere mortals fail to exterminate him, he will succumb when the sun becomes a red giant. Even if he survives *that* event, there is the heat death of the universe."

"You've retained modern cosmology. How unusual of you," Mycroft remarked.

Sherlock shrugged, "John found it amusing."

"I hope you're not thinking to let nature take its course," said Mycroft with a smirk.

"I wouldn't have minded," said Sherlock indifferently.

Mycroft's smirk grew.

"For practical purposes, then, I shall categorize the leader as a charismatic megalomaniac," he said, switching back to the previous subject. "He will seek power-absolute power. I assume he is quite intelligent."

"One of the most brilliant the Others have seen in long time," Sherlock replied. "He is also quite methodological."

"He will take a systemic approach, then," said Mycroft. "First: rally his followers. Second: infiltrate the government. Third: control the media and flow of information. Fourth: eliminate or otherwise incapacitate his enemies."

"He's accomplished the second and third by virtue of the current administration's refusal to consider his comeback and his ability put people under his complete control."

"Then you will need a media outlet that can sow seeds of doubt against the current administration," said Mycroft without missing a beat.

"Done," said Sherlock.

"How nice," Mycroft said ironically. "Well, since you already have a media outlet you can use, you may stage an incident that you can blame on the leader. For instance, if a calculated and contained explosion occurred in 221B-"

" *MYCROFT* !" Harry and Sherlock shouted together in outrage.

"-the law enforcement may wake up to the possibilities," Mycroft continued without even blinking. "But this scenario involves parties whose response is not always predictable."

Harry seethed at Mycroft. Setting 221B on fire wasn't a light matter, not with Benedict and Mrs. Hudson around. How could Mycroft joke about this?!

"The second option is my previous advice: allow the leader to get what he wants," said Mycroft. "Only you must control both when and how. Then you must follow the agent who has done the actual work without being detected."

"Why?" Harry growled.

"Because that agent will return to the *leader*," Mycroft declared.

The office went completely silent after this statement. Harry felt his throat tighten and his heart thud against his chest as he thought through this scenario. If the plan worked, it would allow Harry to find Voldemort when he was still relatively weak… but if something went wrong, he, Harry, would be responsible for bringing Voldemort back.

"It is a delicate and difficult operation to pull off," said Mycroft quietly. "But the results are quite rewarding if done properly. I will leave the details to you. Only remember to take some insurance. The agent shouldn't touch the genuine article, for example, so you will need a suitable substitute… unless, of course, no substitute exists."

Harry looked down.

"What exactly is the leader after, anyway?" Mycroft asked.

"Why d'you want to know?" Harry grumbled.

"Quid pro quo," said Mycroft. "My advice is not for free."

"I already gave you a lot," snapped Harry. "Thanks to me, you know what's going on-more than anyone in this world. This means you have an *advantage* ."

Mycroft smirked again.

"I see so much of you in him, Sherlock," he said mockingly. "You must feel very proud."

Harry angrily wondered if he could get away with turning Mycroft into a gnat.

"Here is a freebee," said Mycroft, still smirking. "I foresee your government staying in denial as long as possible, until it is no longer possible to hide the true nature of the disturbances that is to come. Until that day arrives, it will need a convenient scapegoat. Perhaps they will think to use *us* ."

Mycroft's eyes then bore into Harry's.

"Make of that what you will."

A few minutes later, Sherlock and Harry were outside, Sherlock hailing a cab and Harry stomping furiously at a discarded soda can.

" *I hate him* !" hissed Harry as he glared at the can. He wondered if he should take up something pointlessly rebellious like smoking just to annoy Mycroft.

"You'll have to think of something more creative," said Sherlock, looking very amused. "You've handled him well. Nothing you've said is something he hasn't already deduced."

Harry kicked the flattened can. It clanged noisily against the HMRC

building wall.

"Good!" he snarled.

Harry and Sherlock returned to Baker Street shortly. Once back in 221B, Sherlock instructed Harry to keep his enchanted maps with him at all times, and regularly check if all persons in Hogwarts were who they appeared to be. Then Harry said good-bye to John and Benedict (who spit up on him) and travelled back to Hogwarts through the mantelpiece mirror, which had somehow transformed into an enchanted portal connected to an identical-looking mirror inside the Room of Requirement.

Ron, Hermione, Julia, Neville and Ginny were waiting for him eagerly.

"How did the meeting go?" asked Ron.

"Good-or bad, depending on how you look at it," Harry grumbled.

"What did Mycroft tell you?" Hermione asked. "Did he have good advice like Sherlock said he would?"

"He sounded right," Harry admitted grudgingly. "And his idea *would* work. But I don't think I'm cold-blooded enough to actually pull it off. Hopefully Dumbledore has a better idea. We should go tell him."

"Not now," said Julia, checking her watch. "It's breakfast time. It will look suspicious if we all don't show up."

The six of them left the Room of Requirement after checking the Marauder's map, and headed to the Great Hall. The usual breakfast crowd was there. As Harry surveyed his fellow students at the Gryffindor table, he couldn't help but shake his head in disbelief. It seemed so profoundly strange to him how everyone was living so obliviously when there was evil brewing-an evil people knew about, and feared so much they couldn't even speak his name.

Then Harry noticed Professor Moody approaching the Gryffindor table and blinked.

"Come with me, Potter," growled Professor Moody.

Harry blinked again. "Why?"

"Professor Snape accused you of stealing powdered horn of Bicorn from his private stores," Moody said.

"But I didn't!" Harry exclaimed. He felt outraged at Snape for the false accusation-but also felt uneasy as he wondered if Snape found out he and his friends were brewing the Polyjuice potion extra-legally.

"That's for me to decide," said Moody in low voice. "Now come along."

Harry reluctantly got up. As he trotted after Moody, he heard Dean Thomas whisper to Seamus Finnigan: "Snape's having a go at Harry again…"

Harry followed Moody into his office. Moody closed the door behind them and turned to look at Harry, his magical eye fixed upon him as well as the normal one.

"You ever thought of a career as an Auror, Potter?" he asked abruptly.

"No," said Harry, taken aback.

"You want to consider it," said Moody, nodding and looking at Harry thoughtfully. "Dumbledore told me how you figured out what You-Know-Who is up to. I haven't heard such a brilliant reasoning in years. The Magical Law Enforcement needs someone like you."

Harry didn't know what to say; this wasn't something he had expected at all.

"Sit down," said Moody, and Harry sat, looking around.

He had visited this office under two of its previous occupants. In Professor Lockhart's day, the walls had been plastered with beaming, winking pictures of Professor Lockhart himself. When Remus lived here, before he took a medical leave because of his

heart attack, you were likely to come across a specimen of some fascinating new Dark creature he had procured for them to study in class. Now, however, the office was full of a number of exceptionally odd objects that Harry supposed Moody had used in the days when he had been an Auror. He recognised a few of them, having seen them inside the Room of Requirement. There was a cracked Sneakoscope on Moody's desk, an extra-squiggly, golden television aerial like object on a small table, and a mirror displaying nothing but shadowy figures on the wall opposite to Harry.

"Like my Dark Detectors, do you?" said Moody, who was watching Harry closely.

"What's that?" Harry asked, pointing at the squiggly golden aerial.

"Secrecy Sensor. Vibrates when it detects concealment and lies… no use here, of course, too much interference- students in every direction lying about why they haven't done their homework. It's been humming ever since I got here. I had to disable my Sneakoscope because it wouldn't stop whistling. It's extra-sensitive, picks up stuff about a mile around. Of course, it could be picking up more than kid stuff," he added in a growl.

"And what's the mirror for?"

"That's my Foe-Glass. See them out there, skulking around? I'm not really in trouble until I see the whites of their eyes. That's when I open my trunk." He let out a short, harsh laugh, and pointed to the large trunk under the window. It had seven keyholes in a row. Harry wondered what was in there, until the sound of the door to Moody's office opening and shutting brought him sharply back to earth.

Harry felt his stomach do a funny jolt as he saw Professor Dumbledore and Snape striding towards him and Moody. His teachers didn't exchange any greetings. Dumbledore just gave Moody a little nod, which the latter returned before he clunked unevenly towards the trunk with seven locks, taking out a set of keys hanging next to his hip flask as he walked. Moody fitted the first key in the first lock of the trunk, and opened it.

The trunk contained a mass of spell books. Moody let out an angry

growl and closed the trunk again. He placed a second key in the second lock, and opened the trunk a second time. The spell books had vanished; this time it contained an assortment of broken Sneakoscopes, some parchment and quills, and what looked like a silvery Invisibility Cloak. Moody fitted the seventh key on the seventh lock after closing the trunk once more, and Harry let out a cry of amazement when he opened it again.

The trunk now opened to a kind of pit, an underground room. Moody straightened up and waved a gnarled hand over his open trunk.

"After you," he growled.

Dumbledore climbed into the trunk first and Snape followed after him. At Moody's prompting, Harry too lowered himself in the trunk and fell lightly onto the floor.

"This is to ensure our privacy, Harry," explained Dumbledore, when Moody shut the trunk from the inside. "I have already informed Professor Snape and Professor Moody of the situation. Professor Moody will be organizing our response."

"We don't want the Dark Lord to get hold of your blood," said Moody bluntly. "Not without a fight. But we can't let him know we know what he's up to either."

"Dunno how you can do it," said Harry. "Winter is nosebleed season for me. This year's been particularly bad." He mimed a copious flow of blood dripping down his nose using his right hand.

"The season does make the task even more challenging," said Dumbledore gravely. "Luckily, it will take more than mere blood for Lord Voldemort to accomplish his objective."

"Why?"

"The circumstances behind the blood's collection-as well as the giver and taker's intent-matters very much in this case, Harry," said Dumbledore seriously. "I would go so far as to say it makes all the difference in the world. No doubt you learned this from last night's events."

Harry stared. Snape and Moody's expressions didn't betray any confusion, but Harry knew they didn't know what Dumbledore talking about.

"So he needs to collect it under some special circumstances?" asked Harry after a long beat. "What kind? If he needs me to give it to him willingly, he's in trouble…"

"Yes, we are well aware of your strong moral fibre," said Snape mockingly, making Harry want to stamp his foot or throw something, just to hear it shatter.

"Here is an early lesson in N.E.W.T. level Defence Against the Dark Arts for you, Potter," growled Moody, cutting off Snape. "When it comes down to it, Dark Arts are always a *perversion* . There's nothing dark per say with a spell that lets you turn your neighbour into yak. But if you turn your neighbour into a yak and abandoned him in the mountains without telling anybody, the spell becomes a Dark Art. Do you get this?"

Harry nodded.

"Good," said Moody. "Now about blood: the blood of a wizard or witch, willingly given, is among the most potent magical substances out there. It's so powerful it can even restore a completely broken body, as long as it hadn't been dismembered with dark magic. But if you pervert this to the extreme, what do you get?"

Harry just blinked. He had a feeling he knew the answer, but he couldn't bring himself to think about it.

"Come on, boy…" whispered Moody. "You can figure it out… I know you can…"

Reluctantly, Harry recalled the ritual-like words Dumbledore evoked last night for the werewolf treatment and turned it upside-down.

" *Blood of an enemy, forcefully taken*…" he whispered in quiet horror.

"… *and you shall resurrect your foe*," Dumbledore finished.

There was silence for a span of a minute.

"It's not that hard to engineer the circumstances," said Moody quietly. "A quick, sudden attack or an unexpected kidnapping-either one will do. Personally, I put my money on kidnapping. The agent already used a portkey for his first kidnapping attempt and there's no reason why he won't try again since portkeys can be anything. You'll need to practice *constant vigilance*, Potter. Don't accept anything a stranger offers to you and don't pick up anything that doesn't belong to you either. And if any of your belongings turn up somewhere even slightly out of place, *don't touch it* ."

"How long is this going to last?" Harry asked apprehensively.

"As long as we need it to," said Moody grimly. "We can only relax after we catch the agent-or the unthinkable happens. Professor Lupin agreed to extend his leave to an indefinite one-"

"Why?!" said Harry, dismayed.

"I need an undercover reason to stay," said Moody simply. "As long as Hogwarts needs a substitute Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher, I do."

"Why can't Professor Lupin do the surveillance?" asked Harry.

"Surely you remember he suffered a massive heart attack," said Snape unpleasantly. "And are you saying you find Professor Moody wanting as your bodyguard?"

"Don't put words in my mouth!" Harry shouted furiously. "Why are *you* here, anyway? What does this have anything to do with *you* ?"

"Professor Snape is here on my request," said Dumbledore calmly.

"But WHY?!" Harry demanded.

"He acted as a spy in the last war," said Moody. "He is going to resume his old role if the worst case scenario happens."

Harry went completely still for a moment. Then he started breathing deeply, like he was running very hard.

"… If he was a *spy*," he said slowly. "Do you mean he was a…"

"Death Eater, yeah," Moody growled.

There was another long moment of silence, during which Harry reeled at the news. Never, for all his nastiness, did Harry ever imagine Snape as a Death Eater. And not just any Death Eater, but one who turned into a spy against Lord Voldemort. How did this happen? What made this happen? Had Snape really changed sides? How did Dumbledore know he could trust Snape?

Then Harry remembered the strange, sort-of friendship between John and Snape, and he started to wonder…

"He is not anymore," Dumbledore said calmly. "Professor Snape was indeed a Death Eater. However, he rejoined our side before Lord Voldemort's downfall and turned spy for us, at great personal risk. He is now no more a Death Eater than I am."

But Harry still felt sceptical. He looked at Dumbledore's composed face to see if he could detect any uncertainty. Then he turned to look at Mad-Eye Moody. Moody was wearing a look of guarded scepticism behind Dumbledore's back. Harry finally looked at Snape. He had an expression of malicious enjoyment on his face, like he knew Harry couldn't say anything against him, not when Dumbledore was vouching for his trustworthiness. That infuriated Harry.

"You know I asked my uncle for advice," said Harry recklessly out of temper.

"You don't have an uncle, Potter," said Snape silkily. "Not anymore."

"Vernon Dursley was never my uncle," snapped Harry. "And I was talking about *Mycroft* ."

"Who is he?" asked Moody.

"The British Government," said Harry. "Elected officials don't run the Muggle Government; it's their departmental advisors who do the real work. But Mycroft isn't just any advisor. The other advisors send in their specialist advice, but Mycroft takes these and builds a solution

that balances them all."

"No one is that clever," drawled Snape.

"Well *he* is!" snarled Harry, even as he wondered why he was defending *Mycroft*, of all people. "Anyway, he told me we should stage a way to-to let Voldemort get what he wants. Only he'd get a fake. And we follow his agent back to their HQ when he shows up."

Moody hummed in apparent approval.

"The bait-and-hunt method," he murmured. "Sounds good to me. It certainly helped us catch the filth that tortured Frank and Alice Longbottom…"

" *Alastor!* " said Dumbledore warningly.

Moody fell silent and Harry gaped in shock.

There was another long pause.

"… As you may have gathered, Harry, Professor Moody was talking about Neville's parents," said Dumbledore. "Has Neville ever told you why he lives with his grandmother?"

Harry shook his head numbly.

"Then I think it is best you asked him directly," said Dumbledore solemnly. "Please understand if he chooses not to answer. He has the right to let people know when he is ready."

"Yes, Professor."

"Good. Now regarding the plan you have told us about, I do believe it has merit," Dumbledore said. "It is better to have something concrete to target, rather than to grasp at smoke. The trick is finding a way that would let Lord Voldemort's agent come to collect on a time and way that is most congenial to us, and feed this information to Lord Voldemort without raising his suspicion."

"Perhaps Potter has an idea since he is so vocal about this plan," said Snape, his black eyes alight with malice. "If not, we can always

fall back to our previous plan… though I doubt its effectiveness also, considering Potter's history of rule breaking and wandering…"

"Actually, I have one," growled Moody. "You can always contact the agent for us, Snape, and tell him that you can get him what he wants."

There was a short, heavy sort of silence.

"… And how am I to explain how I knew what the Dark Lord wants, when he has chosen not to contact me?" asked Snape softly.

"Use Potter's reasoning. I'm sure he won't mind," said Moody.

"That does not resolve the problem of how I am to contact the agent," said Snape with a hard edge in his voice.

"That's up to you," said Moody dismissively. "What's wrong, Snape? Aren't you supposed to be Dumbledore's best spy? Don't tell me you can't figure out how to do it…"

"Thank you, Alastor, Severus," said Dumbledore firmly, and Moody and Snape went quiet, though the former's magic eye was still upon the latter, whose eyes still glinted malevolently through his curtain of greasy black hair.

"We cannot make any moves until all the particulars are thought out," said Dumbledore, speaking to everyone. "Until then, we must go on with our daily lives. Harry, of course, will have to exercise all due caution-" Snape let out a derisive noise, "-which he will, I am sure."

Harry turned to leave, but Dumbledore placed a hand on his shoulder.

"I do not think we will have to wait for long to come up with a suitable plan," said Dumbledore cryptically. "We do have all the information we need. It is a matter of putting all the clues together… *from beginning to end* ."

Harry hurried to the History of Magic classroom after the meeting inside Moody's enchanted trunk ended. Professor Binn's had just entered the classroom through the chalkboard when Harry ran inside. Binns didn't even acknowledge Harry's entrance and just opened his notes.

"So what happened?" Ron whispered over Binn's droning.

Harry let out the string of invective he remembered John saying once. Ron, Seamus and Dean stared with horrified admiration and Hermione and Neville looked utterly scandalized in the aftermath.

"Cor, I didn't even understand half of that," said Seamus.

"So how many detentions did you get?" asked Dean.

"None," said Harry with savage satisfaction. "Moody didn't buy Snape's accusations. I reckon Snape's a bit scared of him, you know," he added thoughtfully.

"Imagine the two of them in a duel," said Ron, his eyes misting over, "I'd pay good money to see that…"

The lesson went its usual way after this. Before long, everyone but Hermione was asleep.

"So what really happened?" asked Hermione quietly.

Harry wrote everything down in bullet points-nearly everything, that is. He spilled ink all over the parchment after Hermione finished reading it, making it unintelligible.

"So Dumbledore thinks we should use bait, too," she said quietly.

"It makes sense," said Harry. "I can't stay vigilant all the time, and you should never let your enemy chose the time and place of battle if you can help it."

Hermione bit her lip. "And he trusts Snape, even though he knows he was a Death Eater?"

"Yes," said Harry.

Hermione went quiet after this.

History of Magic dragged on at a snail's pace. Instead of joining his classmates in their slumber, Harry studied Neville, who was snoring with his mouth open. True to his word to Dumbledore, Harry had not told Hermione about Neville's parents. As he stared the puddle of drool under Neville's face, Harry tried to piece together what he heard about Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom. Moody said that Frank and Alice Longbottom had been tortured. When and why did it happen? Neville said his grandmother raised him, which seemed to imply his parents stopped raising him when he was very young. The torture must've been exceptionally bad if Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom weren't able to recover from it. Who was capable of such a horrendous deed?

Eventually Harry remembered what Barty Crouch, Jr. got sent to Azkaban for. Barty Crouch the younger had been discovered in the company of people involved in an early botched attempt to revive Voldemort. What if those people tortured Neville's parents for information? The timing of the two events were close enough, and one of the people caught for the crime, Bellatrix Lestrange, was known for torturing her victims at length for sport, according to Sherlock's index of Death Eaters.

Harry went still as he imagined the progression of events: Mrs. and Mr. Longbottom (who, in Harry's mind, looked like a much older version of Neville), caught unawares a few short months after Voldemort vanished… Someone discovering their dead bodies or tortured selves… Aurors setting a bait to catch their torturers… the culprits getting caught, with Barty Crouch, Jr. (whose face Harry couldn't imagine) in their company… Barty Crouch, Sr. presiding over the trial, where one of the accused included his own son…

Harry felt a rush of anger and hate toward the people who had tortured Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom. He also recalled all the times Neville seemed to be on the verge of saying something whenever they talked about the agent, and how upset he became whenever the Cruciatus Curse was mentioned. Did the culprits use the Cruciatus Curse on his parents? If so, Harry completely understood Neville's inability to talk about it. He wouldn't have, if it were him. Were Neville's parents still alive or in a vegetative state after the

torture they went through? Harry desperately hoped they weren't living vegetables, because that sounded worse than being an orphan. How horrible would it be to have parents who couldn't recognise you?

Then Harry thought about Bartemius Crouch. On the one hand, Harry thought he could respect the man for not trying to unjustly lighten the sentence for his son. But on the other hand, Harry had to wonder if Crouch sentenced his son out of hatred or because of his love for rules-a love that perhaps surpassed his love for family. He certainly presented himself as a person who strictly abided by law and order. That was the main reason why Percy Weasley adored him so much. But then again, Mr. Crouch likely smuggled his son out of Azkaban, even though he knew his son was probably a loyal Death Eater. What was he to make of that?

Who knows what he's like in private? The Sherlock voice in Harry's head asked. Harry had handled enough domestic cases to know what a person was like in public didn't necessarily agree with what the person was like in private. Also, those who tried to build a public persona usually had something to hide in their private lives… and Crouch definitely had something to hide, if Sherlock's deductions on the agent's identity were correct. So-who knew what Crouch was like in private?

It came to Harry almost immediately. And the moment he got the name, he felt the urge to jump around, throw things at the windows, swear loudly, or just scream.

Winky.

Winky the house-elf.

Winky, who still considered Mr. Crouch her master; Winky, who still kept Crouch's secrets because of this.

Winky, *who probably saw the agent on Christmas Eve and in all likelihood was in charge of taking care of him.*

That was the key he had overlooked all this time. Winky knew the agent. All Harry had to do was make Winky recall him and Harry

could collect the memory through his memory harvesting charm, thus gather clear evidence on who the agent was. Perhaps he could even use Winky's connection to the Crouches to feed information back to Voldemort!

I need to tell this to Dumbledore and Sherlock, Harry thought wildly as he looked around the classroom. Binns was still droning something about eighteenth century goblin rebellions and Hermione alone was taking notes. Could it really hurt to just run out of the classroom? It's not like Binns would notice…

Ah, but remember someone is eavesdropping on you, said a voice in Harry's head.

Harry took in a deep breath. He needed an excuse. Thankfully, he had a very good one.

"Hermione," said Harry quietly.

Hermione stopped her scribbling, "Mmn?"

"I need to have a massive nosebleed right now."

Hermione stared at him.

" *Just do it!* " Harry hissed.

But Hermione continued stare at Harry as though he was insane. Unable to stand the wait or go through the bother to explaining further, Harry pointed his wand at himself and muttered the first spell he could think of.

Immediately Harry felt liked someone bludgeoned his head with a cast-iron skillet as warm blood splattered all over his robes and desk. As he groaned through the self-inflicted pain, Harry furiously thought if only Hermione had done what he asked he wouldn't have to go through this.

"Professor Binns!" said Harry as loudly as he could through the crumpled bit of parchment he used to stem the flow of blood. "I need to go to the Hospital Wing!"

Professor Binns raised his eyes from his notes, looking amazed, as always, to find the room in front of him full of people.

"Hospital Wing?" he repeated hazily.

"I'm not feeling well," said Harry as he got to his feet while gesturing at his nose, which was still bleeding profusely. "I think I need to go to the hospital wing."

"Yes," said Professor Binns, clearly very much wrong-footed. "Yes… yes, hospital wing… well, off you go, then, Perkins…"

Harry flew out of the classroom.

Final Notes : GOF is too long… *far* too long. But it's almost over now. Almost… I couldn't update last week due to the FF Net datacenter move.

The Most Tragic Phrase

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2 (but incorporating elements of thereof as much as possible). Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Seven: The Most Tragic Phrase

During his mad dash to the Headmaster's Office, Harry thought how he should pitch his idea to Sherlock. Then about halfway up a staircase, Harry came to an abrupt stop.

How *could* he tell Sherlock and Dumbledore about his plan? The plan didn't work without the memory harvesting charm, but he'd signed a binding magical contract to never divulge the charm's existence. He didn't know if Dumbledore or Sherlock already knew about the charm, but he couldn't ask because mentioning the contract or the spell behind the charm were both forbidden, and if he broke the contract, his magic would be forfeit. What should he do, then?

Harry thought about it for a moment. Then he squared his shoulders. He didn't have to tell his plan to Dumbledore or Sherlock. He could just collect the memory from Winky and show it to them later. There was no reason why either of them would tell him not to. In fact, Sherlock might chide him for bothering to ask.

So Harry turned around and headed downstairs.

He didn't run this time. Besides feeling a bit lightheaded, Harry

remembered something else about the memory harvesting charm that put in him in a state of unease. Miss Jackie went through the trouble of putting him and his friends under a binding magical contract because the charm's potential for danger. Harry had to agree it would be terrible to live in a world where even your memories weren't private because people could syphon them off of you without your permission. How would Winky react, if or when she realised Harry stole her most guarded secret? Because that was basically what he was thinking of doing: stealing. But if he didn't use the memory harvesting charm, Lord Voldemort might return…

Unease followed Harry throughout his quiet trek to the kitchens. Then before he knew it, he was opening the door to the kitchens.

The house-elves screamed as one when they spotted Harry at the kitchen's entrance. It took a few blinks before Harry realised what they were seeing: with his face and robes covered in blood, and more blood still flowing freely out of his nose, he must look like someone tried to murder him and almost succeeded.

"WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HARRY POTTER!?" Blippy screeched.

"I'm okay," said Harry as he tried to wipe off the blood on his face with his robe sleeve. "This is just a nosebleed, so never mind. Where is Winky?"

Before any of the elves could answer, Harry spotted Winky at her old spot at the fireplace. She wasn't as filthy as the last time he saw her, but she was swaying as though drunk.

"Winky!" Harry said as he hurried over to her. "Winky, listen…"

Winky looked blearily up. Her eyes brightened when she noticed who was speaking to her.

"Has you word from my master?" she asked breathlessly-desperately.

Harry froze. It felt like a deep chasm had yawned open before him, and what he chose to do now would make all the difference in the

world.

Could he really do this? Could he really just steal Winky's memory? One of his worst fears was waking up one day in Baker Street and John frowning at him like she'd never seen him before, then asking the dreaded question: "Who are you?" Was there any real difference to what he was planning to do and *Obliviate* ?

"Harry Potter?" asked Winky timidly.

Harry lost his nerve.

"… No," he muttered. "No, I don't have the news you want."

Winky completely deflated.

"But you still need to hear this," said Harry urgently. "Your master-Mr. Crouch-he's in trouble."

Winky gasped and her face paled.

"I think someone's using Mr. Crouch to do something horrible," Harry explained. "I also think this person… is responsible for the bad thing that happened to Mr. Crouch on Christmas the year before."

Winky was visibly shaking now.

"I want to stop this person," said Harry. Then he paused for a moment, and willed the spots clouding the peripheries of his vision away. "Mr. Crouch-gave one of my best friends justice, even though it cost him almost everything. So I want to help him. But to do that, I need something from you."

"… What is you needing from Winky?" Winky asked guardedly, as she trembled from head to toe.

"Your memories of the person who celebrated Christmas with Mr. Crouch two years ago," said Harry.

Winky turned white. For a long she just stared unblinkingly at Harry, her hands over his mouth. Then she curled into a tiny ball and rocked backwards and forwards. She was the very picture of

someone torn between two opposite choices-one bad, the other perhaps even worse.

"Is my master really in trouble?" Winky asked without looking up. "You is not lying to Winky?"

" *No*," said Harry firmly. "You can ask Mr. Lestrade if you want."

"How is that memory going to help my master?" Winky asked again. "Why is you needing that memory at all?"

"How I should help Mr. Crouch depends on who is responsible," said Harry impatiently. "Look, I'm not out to get him, okay? I told you I owe him one!"

But Winky still hesitated. Harry desperately tried to think of something else he could say that could convince Winky, but he couldn't. His brain felt clogged and heavy.

"You should listen to Harry Potter, Winky," said a wrinkled old elf overseeing a tall soup pot; one of the older females, if Harry remembered correctly. "No wizard has cared about us house-elves as Harry Potter has. And he would not bother asking you if he is not caring about you."

Winky hung her head after that comment. She then pulled at her long, bat-like ears. Harry kept opening and closing his eyes to clear the spots that threatened to overtake his vision while he waited.

"… You promise you is not using Winky's memory against Mr. Crouch?" Winky asked at last.

Harry let out a long sigh. "I'll do everything in my power not to," he promised.

Winky drooped.

"What does Winky need to do?" she mumbled.

"Just… *remember*," Harry whispered as he took out the charm.

Harry stayed alert long enough to see the silvery vapour flowing out

of Winky's eyes and ears embed itself to his memory harvesting charm. Then black and white dots overtook Harry's vision and Harry keeled over. As he fuzzily wondered why he was so dizzy, face down on the kitchen's stone floor with all the House-elves panicking around him, Harry felt rather than saw the small puddle of blood gathering under his nose.

Blood loss… Damn my anaemia… Harry thought as he blacked out.

Harry drifted in and out of consciousness for what felt like hours. In the beginning, he heard a cacophonous chorus of high-pitched crying and screaming. Then he thought he heard Madam Pomfrey's voice, though he didn't know why she was within his earshot. He'd been pretty good about his health this year- no trips to the hospital wing for two months straight, a new record-but he also heard Dumbledore's voice, which made him even more bewildered. What kind of scrape did he get into this year?

When Harry finally woke up, he felt perplexed. Where was he? How long had he been out? *Why* had he been out? He managed to open one gummily shut eye, but he still couldn't make out his surroundings. The room was too bright and everything looked blurry.

Then Harry noticed the familiar, tennis-ball shaped eyes peering at him inches away from his face.

"G'way, Dobby…" Harry mumbled, closing his eye again.

" *Harry Potter*," said a trembling voice that didn't quite sound like Dobby's. "I is needing to tell you something…"

"… Later… "

"No, I is needing to tell you *now…* "

Harry groaned and turned his head to the other side. "Whaisit?" he asked irritably.

"Winky needs something from Harry Potter," said the not-quite Dobby voice. "Young master Barty says I must take it from Harry

Potter by force, but Winky cannot. Winky does not wish to harm Harry Potter. So Winky *asks* ."

Harry wondered why Dobby was calling himself Winky as he answered:

"… Fine."

Harry heard a tearful, shuddering sigh. Then he felt a prickle, much like the sensation of a needle drawing blood.

"… Thank you, Harry Potter," said the voice.

Harry grunted and turned away, thinking he'd better go back to sleep.

Then suddenly, he realised what had just happened.

"No, Winky, stop… !"

But he was too late. Winky had vanished.

Albus Dumbledore spent most of his morning placating Argus Filch, who had barged into his office in the middle of the first morning classes and launched a tirade against the student who left a long trail of blood on several stairways and corridors as a prank presumably. Filch refused to leave until Dumbledore promised he would punish the student, and Dumbledore steadfastly declined to punish the hypothetical student unless he or she was proven guilty. As often was the case in such stalemates, Filch threatened to resign and Dumbledore told Filch he regretted his decision to leave and mentioned the Squibs who expressed interest in replacing him. Only then did Filch relent, very reluctantly.

Dumbledore let out a weary sigh after the door closed behind Filch. Then he noticed his Magical Mobile phone was alight with bright purple flames and the words ' *you have two missed calls* ' was hovering over it. So Dumbledore fiddled around with his phone to find out who had called him, referring to the holographic manual several times to figure out how to do this exactly.

After several tries, he got a name and called the person.

"Hello, Poppy," said Dumbledore to the holographic projection of Madam Pomfrey. "My apologies, but Argus insisted on my undivided attention. So why did you call me?"

"The house-elves brought Mr. Potter to the Hospital Wing this morning, headmaster," said the school matron. "The boy had severe Epistaxis and fainted inside the kitchens from blood loss. I just wanted to let you know."

"Dear me," said Dumbledore worriedly. "Do we need to send him to St. Mungos?"

Madam Pomfrey shook her head. "I gave him some blood-replenishing potion. He should come around soon."

"Excellent. How are the elves doing?"

"Last time I saw them, they were all very distressed. Blippy even threatened to lock himself in an oven, but Plocks stopped him. She told him he can punish himself after they found Winky… though what she meant by this, I have no idea…"

Dumbledore's blue eyes went wide. "She mentioned *Winky* ?"

"Yes," said Madam Pomfrey, surprised. "Why do you ask?"

"It could be significant," said Dumbledore. "Did you ask the elves why Harry was in the *kitchens* ?"

Madam Pomfrey shook her head again.

"There was no use asking. I couldn't get a single coherent word out of them between the screaming and crying…"

Dumbledore had a word with the Hogwarts house-elves after ending the call. The elves could tell him precious little on what Harry came to the kitchens for, but they were vociferous in their declaration that Winky was a very, very bad elf. Finally Plocks, the oldest female house-elf in Hogwarts, managed to tell Dumbledore Harry Potter had wanted something from Winky-a memory of a person. As soon

as she said this, Dumbledore had an inkling of what Harry tried to do. But before he could move on to confirm, he received a call from a very flustered Detective Chief Inspector G. Lestrade.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded.

"I myself am wondering about the same thing," Dumbledore answered. "Can you tell me, please, what made you ask?"

"The free house-elf you lent to me, Winky, popped inside my office about an hour ago," said Lestrade. "She wanted to know if Crouch was in trouble."

"Did you ask why she wanted to know?"

"Nah," said Lestrade. "I actually thought she got caught into some harebrained scheme Sherlock cooked up but didn't tell me about. The bastard's done that to me before."

"So what did you tell her?" asked Dumbledore with a small smile.

"Told her I don't know; I haven't seen him for a while."

"That's rather usual," said Dumbledore. "Were you not working closely with Mr. Crouch? And are you not spending at least three afternoons a week doing Ministry business?"

"Yes, and I am," said Lestrade wearily. "Problem is: Crouch stopped showing up to the Ministry. Said he was too ill. His personal assistant, Percy Weasley, is acting as his intermediary via Owl post."

"I see," said Dumbledore thoughtfully. "How long has Mr. Crouch been ill?"

"About two weeks."

"And Percy is certain it is Mr. Crouch who is writing to him?"

"I wondered the same thing and asked Percy. He got really offended; said he can recognise his boss's handwriting just fine, thanks."

"Ah, youth," said Dumbledore ruefully. "Thank you for telling me this, Greg. Now if it isn't too much to ask, could you be so kind and pay Mr. Crouch a visit? I've been concerned about him for some time, and this last bit of news is quite alarming. Just be sure June Hu is accompanying you when you go."

"Uh, yeah, sure," said Lestrade, startled. "I'll drop by this evening."

"Thank you. That would be wonderful."

"You're welcome. Oh, by the way," Lestrade added, "another house-elf popped into my office after Winky left. One of yours, I think; the tea towel he was wearing had the Hogwarts crest stamped on the corner."

"That does sound like one of our Hogwarts elves. What did he-or she-want?"

"Wanted to know if I saw Winky. When I told him she just left, he stomped around on my desk, shouting: *Winky you is a bad elf! BAD ELF! No wonder you's master sacked you!* "

Dumbledore drooped a little. "Oh dear…"

"Then he left," said Lestrade. "This brings me back to my original question-what the hell is going on?"

"I have guesses, but nothing more," said Dumbledore. "I do not think I am in liberty to speak them yet."

"You do that a lot," Lestrade remarked. "Deferring straight answers, I mean. No wonder Sherlock's annoyed with you."

"It's an old habit, one I am working hard to break," said Dumbledore gravely. "Thank you, again, Greg. I'll get back to you as soon as I gather more information."

Lestrade saluted and ended the call.

Dumbledore headed to the hospital wing afterwards. He exchanged greetings with Madam Pomfrey, who led him to the lone screened hospital bed.

"Something happened to him, Albus," said Pomfrey worriedly, "Something *terrible.* I just… well, you'll soon see for yourself…"

"Thank you, Poppy," said Dumbledore quietly.

Then Dumbledore entered the small screened area.

Harry lay on the bed within. He was staring emptily at the ceiling, as though he didn't have the strength to look anything else. He was also running a thumb over a small cut on his hand.

"I'm glad to see you awake, Harry," Dumbledore began. "You've given us quite a fright."

Harry didn't even blink. His eyes displayed emptiness only cataclysmic loss or life-altering failure could produce.

"I do not wish to pry," said Dumbledore. "But can you tell me why you were in kitchens?"

Harry didn't react for a very long time. But something in him seemed to collapse, bit by bit.

"… Too late," he whispered at length. "It's too late…"

Dumbledore studied him for a moment.

"Even if there is nothing at all we can do now, we still need to understand," Dumbledore said quietly. "Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery… and the possibility of correction."

Harry remained silent, but let his head roll to the side opposite to Dumbledore, thus looking away.

The silence stretched.

"Please tell me what happened," Dumbledore pleaded.

Harry breathed deeply though his nose. Then, after another bout of hesitation, he started to speak… how he figured out Winky had the memory of seeing the agent… how he went straight to Winky to ask

for the memory instead of telling Dumbledore or Sherlock… how, after obtaining the memory, he passed out… and finally, how Winky asked for his blood and he let her have it, because he was too stupid and groggy to realise what she was asking for…

"… Winky took your blood," said Dumbledore, while standing very still.

"I was so *stupid*," Harry muttered bitterly. "I *knew* Voldemort was after my blood… I *knew* the agent was probably Barty Crouch, Jr.… Winky adores the Crouches, so *of course* she'd go and check on him… but I-"

"You were recovering from blood-loss, Harry."

"That was my fault, too!" said Harry miserably. "I used the wrong spell… I have *anaemia*, I don't *have* the blood the spare… if only-"

"Do not torture yourself over things you can only know in hindsight," said Dumbledore firmly. " ' *If only* ' is one of the most tragic phrases in the world, and I advise you not to wallow in it use. Let the past be past, Harry, and keep on and keeping on."

This time Harry stared Dumbledore, looking aghast.

"But-I just proved I can't handle a case this big… I shouldn't…"

"You did not," said Dumbledore quietly. "You acted far braver, nobler and wiser than I could have expected of you. You were the first to realise Winky was the key witness. You did not take away Winky's memory, even though you had the power to. Instead you *asked*, thus granting her the dignity of choice. How many wizards and witches do you think would've acted as nobly as you?"

" *But it was wrong* !" said Harry in anguish. "I should've just taken the memory! Then Winky would've never gone to Crouch! Now Voldemort has my blood and-"

" *Exactly*," said Dumbledore, as he looked piercingly at Harry. "Lord Voldemort has your blood, but not the type of blood he sought! Remember, Harry, that Voldemort seeks the blood of his enemy, *forcefully taken* . Winky repaid your kindness by not taking your

blood against your will, though Crouch no doubt ordered her to. So the blood she took to Voldemort is blood *willingly* given."

Harry blinked many times as he digested this.

"… And this is a good thing?" he asked incredulously. "Professor Moody said a wizard's blood, willingly given, can restore completely broken bodies. That's exactly what Voldemort wants."

"Yes, Harry, it is a good thing," said Dumbledore. "This is magic at its deepest and most impenetrable. But trust me… though Lord Voldemort may still be able to use your blood, I would not be surprised if the new body he gained through your blood does him more harm than good."

Harry nodded slightly as he pondered this.

Then, slowly, he bowed his head.

"… I wish I did better," he whispered to his hands. "I wish things happened differently."

"So do all those who wish to spare their loved ones suffering," said Dumbledore gently. "But that is not for us to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

Harry looked up. "I didn't know you read Tolkien, professor."

"Well, I've been compared to a certain wizard he created more than once, so I read his most famous work to see what the fuss was about. Professor McGonagall was not very pleased when I emerged from the reading with a penchant for grey cloaks and claymores."

Harry let out a weak laugh. Then, after wetting his lips, Harry hardened his expression.

"I'll get over this," he promised. "I won't let Voldemort win. Just… not now. Not yet."

A week had passed since Harry left History of Magic, bleeding.

Hermione found her recollections of those days scattered and extremely painful. None of her friends could talk about them, least of all Harry.

Harry remained utterly silent since he returned from the Hospital Wing. Many in his extended circle of friends had some idea of the cause, as quite a few of them offered him help. Justin Finch-Fletchley, Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbott asked if he had been investigating into Bartemius Crouch Senior's disappearance, which the Magical Mobile Network's televised newscast and the *Daily Prophet* reported, and Susan Bones offered to talk to her Aunt, Amelia Bones, who was head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Harry forced himself to smile at these friendly gestures before shaking his head.

The most painful and ironic help came from Fred and George Weasley. They took their younger siblings and Hermione to the side to have a word:

"We knew you three were helping Harry with a case when you lot started spending long hours in the Music Room," said Fred knowingly. "There are only so many times you can practice the piano and run over accounts, you know."

Ron put on an odd expression. Hermione felt a mixture of exasperation, fury and a strong desire to scream.

"Does Harry think Crouch had a part in Pettigrew's escape?" asked George, making Hermione flinch. "We didn't think it was a coincidence Crouch sacked his house-elf shortly afterwards. Crouch's recent disappearance just cinches it. Anyway, we asked Winky before Christmas break if she could tell us anything. She didn't tell us much-still keeping her old master's secret and all that-but she did tell us Ludo Bagman was a bad wizard."

Hermione, Ron and Ginny started.

"What do you mean?" said Hermione sharply. "Are you saying he's involved too?"

"Not exactly," said George gloomily. "The stupid git, he wouldn't

have the brains."

"Well, what, then?" said Ron.

Fred hesitated, and then said, "You remember that bet we had with him at the Quidditch World Cup? About how Ireland would win, but Krum would get the Snitch?"

"Yeah," said Ron slowly.

"Well, the git paid us in leprechaun gold he'd caught from the Irish mascots."

"So?"

" *So*," said Fred impatiently, "it vanished, didn't it? By next morning, it had gone!"

"But- it must've been an accident, mustn't it?" said Hermione.

George laughed very bitterly.

"Yeah, that's what we thought, at first. We thought if we just wrote to him and told him he'd made a mistake, he'd cough up. But nothing doing. Ignored our letters. So we kept calling him until he picked up."

"Was that the day before the delegation from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang arrived?" Hermione said.

"Right in one," said Fred. "He still avoided the issue, and kept trying to get away from us when we tried to talk to him about it at Hogwarts. In the end he turned pretty nasty. Told us we were too young to gamble, and he wasn't giving us anything."

"So we asked for our money back," said George glowering.

"He didn't refuse!" gasped Hermione.

"What do you think?" Fred groused.

"But that was all your savings!" said Ron.

"Tell me about it," said George. "'Course, we found out what was

going on in the end. Lee Jordan's dad had had a bit of trouble getting money off Bagman as well. Turns out he's in big trouble with the goblins. Borrowed loads of gold off them. A gang of them cornered him in the woods after the World Cup and took all the gold he had, and it still wasn't enough to cover all his debts. They followed him all the way to Hogwarts to keep an eye on him. He's lost everything gambling. Hasn't got two Galleons to rub together. And you know how the idiot tried to pay the goblins back?"

"How?" said Ginny.

"He tried to skim off from the money you gave the Ministry for the Triwizard Tournament broadcasts," said Fred.

"Shut up!" Ron exclaimed.

"Sorry, Ron, but it's true," said George, shaking his head. "We've seen him do it. Bagman didn't buckle when we confronted him about it. So Fred and I sent an anonymous tip to the Ministry. I expect they'll start investigating him for embezzlement soon. But as far as him and other criminal activity goes, don't you think he'd do anything for a bit more money?"

Hermione, Ron and Ginny said nothing and just stared at them.

"Will this help?" asked George, looking a bit concerned.

One by one, the three of them dropped their glances.

"… No," said Ron shortly. "No, it won't."

So the days passed by. Soon everyone's attention was focused on the Second Task of the Triwizard Tournament. Hermione had never been more uninterested and unmotivated about it, even though she and her friends had to do the filming and broadcasting.

Because what was the point, really? It was too late, the agent was long gone and You-Know-Who got what he wanted. They'd failed-*she* failed-and no money or success in the world was going to change this. But unfortunately, as Miss Jackie told them, the show had to go on.

If only… if only she'd trusted Harry- did what he asked her to do at History of Magic- things would've turned out very different. They would be celebrating a job well done by now, probably. But no, she was too busy being a 'good student' who knew better. Well, if she really was clever, she would've realised getting Outstandings in all her classes meant nothing-absolutely nothing-in a world You-Know-Who had power.

The time-turner hanging on the chain around Hermione's neck felt very heavy during the week. In her most guilt-filled moments, Hermione was severely tempted to use it… to travel back in time and fix everything. But Hermione knew the law, and she understood enough about time-travel theory to know the current time included any of her actions to change the past. No matter what she did, the outcome would still be the same.

The day before the Second Task, Hermione finally made up her mind. She stayed behind after Transfigurations to talk to her Head of House.

"Professor McGonagall, I'd like to drop Muggle Studies."

Professor McGonagall looked at her in astonishment.

"I'm surprised," she said. "I thought you were doing very well in all your subjects."

Hermione shook her head. "The time-turner… it's driving me mad. And I don't think Muggle Studies will help my future goals."

Professor McGonagall pursed her lips for a moment.

"Alright, Miss Granger, if that is your decision…"

"Thank you," said Hermione.

Hermione removed the time-turner from her neck and handed it over to Professor McGonagall like it was something that burned. Then she turned and hurriedly walked away.

She didn't look back.

Harry visited 221B every evening since the Winky incident. Thus John and Sherlock were with him when Dumbledore came to watch all the memories Harry collected from Winky.

As it turned out, Sherlock's deductions about the agent were more or less correct. One of the earliest memories showed them the day Crouch returned from Azkaban half-carrying a wispy little witch who eventually transformed into a fair-haired boy in his late teens. Crouch left the shivering, half-dead wreck of a boy in Winky's care, but not before he put the boy under the Imperius Curse. Later, when the boy recovered his health, Crouch, Sr. made the boy wear an invisibility cloak at all times-to ensure no one knew his son was in the house, clearly. Another memory showed a young witch Sherlock recognised as Bertha Jorkins sneaking into Crouch's kitchen to investigate, as Winky talked to the invisible Crouch, Jr., and Crouch, Sr. putting a memory charm on Bertha Jorkins when she confronted him about her discovery.

"So that's why Crouch Jr. got rid of her," Sherlock remarked. "He may have even killed her in Albania as a red-herring-make us think LV was still there."

"Sherlock, shut up," said John, while Harry blanched.

Most of the memories afterwards featured Winky convincing Crouch, Sr. to give his son treats for good behavior… the very last of these a festive Christmas Party for three. The memory of this Christmas Dinner went black abruptly after Mr. Shin finished telling Crouch, Sr. about Pettigrew, and Mr. Shin's disembodied head vanished from the flames with a small pop.

The final memory showed them Barty Crouch Jr. as he was right now: older, but still pale-skinned, slightly freckled, with a mop of fair hair. There was a glint of insane glee in his eyes as he listened to Winky's concerns, whilst looking convincingly dejected and morose.

"You're right, Father and I are in trouble-deep trouble," whispered Crouch.

"Is there anything Winky can do for young master Barty?" asked

Winky urgently.

"I can't ask you anything, not when Father dismissed you," Crouch demurred.

"No, no, just ask Winky, and Winky will do it!" Winky insisted.

"Will you, really?" said Crouch slowly. "You'll really do anything for me?"

"Yes, Winky will!"

" *Thank you*, Winky," said Crouch solemnly. "Thank you… Now Winky… there one thing you can get for me that will save me from all the trouble."

Winky clasped her hands earnestly. "Name it, young master Barty!"

An insane smile spread across Crouch's face.

"… I need Harry Potter's blood."

They stopped watching there. There was no point. Any further confirmation would've been just cold comfort.

"What happens now?" asked John in the silence that followed.

"All those that we can persuade of the truth must be notified immediately," said Dumbledore. "I've sent a message to Arthur Weasley. He is well placed to contact those at the Ministry who are not as shortsighted as Cornelius."

"I take it he's not convinced?" said Sherlock.

Dumbledore shook his head grimly.

"I am also gathering the people who are already aware of the situation," Dumbledore went on. "Fudge's attitude, though not unexpected, changes everything. I have tasked Sirius to gather the old crowd. Severus will resume his old role as spy as soon as his Dark Mark burns."

"Aren't we forgetting something?" said Sherlock in low voice. "The perpetuator of this mess, for instance? Doesn't it make more sense to cut him down before he starts? Or has the fact he'd gained extra power via Harry's blood made you hesitate?"

"Voldemort will not gain more power through Harry's blood," said Dumbledore. "He may, at best, gain the ability to touch Harry because Lily Potter's sacrifice, which runs through his veins, would now run in him also."

"How exactly are you justifying this conclusion when you have empathically stated Love is the most powerful of all magic?" Sherlock demanded.

"Sherlock, 'powerful' can mean more than just possessing great force," said Dumbledore with a bit of impatience in his voice. "Friends banding together under a worthy cause-this is powerful. A man giving up his personal ambitions for the sake of family-this is powerful. A mother sacrificing her life to save her child-this, too, is powerful. The Magic reflecting this power will not necessarily grant a person greater raw strength, but can overcome the greatest of Dark Arts. This case, if nothing else, should've taught you this."

Sherlock turned every thoughtful after this statement.

An investigation into Bartemius Crouch, Sr. opened when Lestrade and his father-in-law discovered his body. He had been killed, transfigured into a bone, and then buried in the back garden. It was difficult to say when he died, as the transfiguration messed up the body's decomposition process, but the lack of any kind of detectable cause to his death made it clear how he was killed. There were no traces of his son or Winky in the abandoned estate.

"I let her go," said Harry brokenly when Lestrade told them the news.

John, who sat next Harry at the couch, tightened her hold around him. Sherlock watched the two of them whilst holding Benedict.

"There's no way you could've stopped her," said Sherlock quietly.

Harry said nothing. He just blinked his too-shiny eyes.

Silence laid heavily the room.

"We'll handle this," said John firmly. "We'll do this together. You're not alone."

Harry still didn't reply-for a very long time. But his breathing changed, and it didn't sound like a prelude to tears. John lightly nudged him.

"Babe?"

No response. At length, Sherlock and John peered into Harry's face.

Harry looked like he fell into a fretful sleep. His eyes were closed, but they were shifting rapidly under the eyelids. He was also sweeting and shivering all at once.

John and Sherlock watched this go on for another second. Then Sherlock fished around Harry's pockets, and found a paper charm that had Runes written all over it in his inner jacket pocket. Sherlock placed the charm on Harry's face. Silvery vapour flowed out of Harry's nose and eyes and seeped into the paper.

Once the paper turned completely silver, John took the charm from Sherlock and placed it on Harry's magical mobile phone…

Severus stayed in the castle while everyone else headed to the lake to watch the Second Task of the Triwizard tournament. He had no desire whatsoever to see it. It was not as if Potter was present for him to supervise. The brat was in London, having run away to his mummy and daddy like the frightened little boy he was.

Severus instinctively repressed the powerful sense of regret that threatened to overwhelm him whenever he thought about Watson and Holmes. He never got around to contacting Watson, and Watson never called back since Jeremy Benedict's birth. Just a random text message here and there, and even those stopped after Christmas.

But it was just as well he didn't contact Watson. Severus would soon have to resume his role as a spy, and any insinuation of friendship between him a Muggle-especially Harry Potter's guardians- from this point on would spell his death. It was better that they never reconciled, when the alternative was Severus breaking the truce again.

But if only…

About an hour after the Second Task started, Severus heard loud screams echoing from the lake's direction. Bagman's amplified voice shouted something hysterically. But before Severus could even wonder what was going on, he felt his left forearm burn as though someone had pressed a red-hot branding iron on it. Severus then knew without a shadow of doubt:

Lord Voldemort had risen again.

Final Notes : So ends GOF (the case). Not as much action as Canon, but a lot of necessary growing up happened, I think. Stay tuned for OOTP. (… What am I getting myself into?)

LOTR quotes are inevitable in a chapter like this. Of course, as I hunted down the precise quote, my irreverent imagination conjured up a Halloween party in 221B where Dumbledore dresses up as Gandalf and Shin a Balrog, and the two enact the bridge scene in Moria… (BOC gets shot).

ETA: When Harry collected Winky's memory, she gave him *all* her memories of Barty Crouch, Jr. since Crouch, Sr. smuggled him out of prison.

The Dark Lord Questions

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Eight: The Dark Lord Questions

Two hours after the initial burn of his Dark Mark, Severus Snape left Hogwarts and Apparated to a location he didn't know, but to a person whose presence he could sense.

He reappeared in what looked like a dimly lit hall. A long table stood in the middle of it, and a few hooded figures occupied the seats on the longer sides. Severus couldn't help but suppress a shiver as he took in the sight of the person who sat at the head of the table: the Dark Lord.

The Dark Lord looked more inhuman and terrifying than he did last. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils, his countenance was nightmare personified. His large, pale spider-like hands caressed a wand made of yew and looked ready to strike without warning.

"You are late, Snape," said the Dark Lord in cold, high voice as Severus bowed low. "But more importantly, you are *here* . I confess I had not expected you to return."

"I came as soon as I was able to, my Lord," said Severus solemnly.

"What delayed you?"

"My Lord must know all your Death Eaters have noticed your steady regaining of strength through the gradual reappearance of the Dark Mark," Severus replied. "Albus Dumbledore didn't fail to notice its reappearance also, and ordered me, his supposed stooge, to return to your side as his spy should my Dark Mark burn. I consented because it would allow me to both return to you and retain my role as *your* spy. So here I am, ready to receive my next orders."

Silence fell in the hall after this statement.

"You have come *after* Dumbledore gave you orders to leave," said the Dark Lord. It was not a question.

Severus dipped his head lower and said nothing.

There was another bout of perilous silence. Then the Dark Lord issued a chilly command:

" *Raise your head* ."

Severus did so. The Dark Lord's scarlet eyes bore into Severus's for a long time. Severus never once looked away or blinked. All the black-robed and hooded people seated at the table seemed to hold their breath as the Dark Lord probed into Severus's mind.

At length a thin, amused smile flickered on the Dark Lord's lipless mouth.

"The old fool," the Dark Lord concluded. "But then again, Dumbledore always did want to believe the best in people… always willing to give second chances…"

"He counted me among his greatest triumphs," said Severus contemptuously. "But, my Lord, you know better."

"I do now," said the Dark Lord. "I regret not confiding to you three years ago, when I attempted to steal the Philosopher's Stone. Relying on a mediocre wizard like Quirrell was tiresome."

"I would have helped you," said Severus quietly. "But as it was, I

thought the unworthy Quirrell was trying to steal the stone for himself."

"So you did; it doesn't matter now," said the Dark Lord. "I welcome you back into the fold, Severus Snape. But I require from you payment-payment for never seeking me out these last thirteen years, as did all who are here with the exception of two…"

"As my Lord wishes," said Severus, bracing himself.

The Dark Lord rose to his feet.

" *Come,* " he hissed softly. "The rest of you, remain."

Severus followed after him, down a narrow hallway and into a smaller room furnished in silver and green. It was cold and dark inside. A single lit candle on the mantelpiece flickered as the chilly afternoon breeze filtered through an open window. Dark green tapestries hung on the walls and ceiling, and they, too, rustled subtly.

The Dark Lord stopped in front of the old stone fireplace and turned halfway to Snape.

"Tell me what Dumbledore knows," he ordered.

Severus dutifully recited the rehearsed script prepared months in advance: Dumbledore knew he would hear something from the Dark Lord after Pettigrew escaped, but didn't notice what he and his unexpected rescuer were up to until Bertha Jorkin's disappearance. He concluded her disappearance was a blind, as the time gap between the event and Pettigrew's escape was too wide. He also reasoned from the goblet's fourth flame that a loyal Death Eater had infiltrated the Ministry of Magic in order to force Harry Potter to compete in the tournament. However, this Death Eater didn't know Harry Potter had changed his name, so the attempt had been foiled. Since then Dumbledore sought to uncover the agent.

"What does Dumbledore know of my loyal Death Eater?" the Dark Lord asked.

"Dumbledore concluded he must be Bartemius Crouch, Jr., and that

he used the Polyjuice potion to replace his father during the Triwizard Tournament," said Severus.

The Dark Lord's expression was like marble.

"… How did he find this out?" he asked quietly.

Severus explained how Dumbledore first used an enchanted map of Hogwarts that revealed the real names of the people present to uncover the agent during the First Task of the Triwizard tournament, reasoning the person who had the wrong name for their physical appearance would be he. When the map didn't reveal anyone who fit this description, Dumbledore used DNA profiling to discern the Death Eater's identity. It was difficult to describe what exactly DNA was to the Dark Lord, but Severus sensed the moment when the Dark Lord understood enough to see how Barty Crouch had blundered.

"So by attending the Yule Ball, Crouch had revealed himself."

"Yes, my Lord," Severus confirmed. "When the DNA profile of Crouch at the ministry was compared to that of Crouch at the Yule Ball, it was determined they were father and son. Therefore, the son must have escaped Azkaban somehow."

"Even though there are witnesses to his burial?"

An ironic smile touched Severus' lips.

"When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth," he quoted. "Dumbledore came very close to discovering Crouch, my Lord, but fate has favoured you. Though Dumbledore knew who to look for, he did not have the means of finding him until the second task. So he waited."

"And waited too long," said the Dark Lord, smiling thinly. "Yes, I see how fate has been on my side in more ways than one…"

Then he abruptly turned serious.

"I have been warned against DNA," said the Dark Lord. "I admit to not paying much attention it, for the warning came from a man who

is a poorer wizard than even Wormtail. I see that I have erred. It shall not happen again. Now, who gave *Dumbledore* the idea to use DNA profiling?"

"Detective Chief Inspector Lestrange, my Lord," Severus answered. "He is the lost Lestrange son-the one Hamon Lestrange abandoned in the Muggle world when it was thought he was a Squib. He is now a senior Muggle law enforcement officer specializing in serious crimes. I have been told DNA profiling is a regular part of Muggle criminal investigations."

"Lucius told me he is rising rapidly through the ranks in the Ministry of Magic," said the Dark Lord thoughtfully. "He cannot be a Squib if he can use magic now. How did he lose the use of his magic and then regain it, Snape?"

"My apologies, Lord," said Severus, bowing. "But I'm not privy to that information."

"Then I expect you to obtain it," said the Dark Lord severely. "You are his pure-blood daughter's teacher, are you not? Gain her confidence and ask."

"I will-immediately."

"See that you do. Now what can you tell me about her grandfather, Shin June Hu?"

Severus dutifully reported Grandmaster Shin was as inscrutable as he had been in the past, and just as disinclined to give his allegiance to any side. But he definitely cared about his family; he left no doubt of this when he threatened to take away the magic of the person responsible for petrifying his daughter via Basilisk. Lucius Malfoy was lucky Shin placed the sole blame on the 'soul wand' that manipulated the Basilisk-i.e. the Dark Lord's diary.

"Lucius, my slippery friend…" said the Dark Lord with cold fury when Severus finished talking. "I see he had acted presumptuously. He shall answer to me. So what came of the diary, Snape?"

"It was destroyed."

A dark aura radiated out of the Dark Lord like a black shockwave after this statement. The candle went out and the tapestries flapped furiously as though a gale tore through them. A weaker wizard would've dropped to their knees at the onslaught, but Severus stoically remained on his feet.

" *The fool!* " the Dark Lord shrieked. "Lucius would not have live past this day had he still not have some use to me! But he will live to regret it! I shall see to this!"

Severus remained silent while the Dark Lord poured out his fury. Finally, the Dark Lord withdrew his wrath and the tapestries settled down.

"So Shin will neither hinder nor help," said the Dark Lord coldly. "Then so he shall remain. The rest of his family is worthless or else useless. The eldest daughter I have slaughtered and the younger daughter is a Squib. I heard his sons live as Muggles and his granddaughter cannot even properly wield a wand."

"Your information is true, my Lord."

"So much for the Shin family," the Dark Lord sneered. "The son-in-law is an interesting possibility, but I shall wait and see how true the Lestrange blood runs through his veins."

The Dark Lord further inquired into Dumbledore's activities. Snape reported Dumbledore had regrouped the Order of Phoenix and was planning to send an envoy to the Giants. Dumbledore was also planning to send overtures to the werewolf community, promising them a cure. The Dark Lord sneered derisively at both gestures.

Once he sensed the Dark Lord was satisfied with all the information he had, Severus ventured to ask a question.

"My Lord… may I dare ask… how did you achieve this miracle?"

"So you are curious as well," said the Dark Lord, looking amused.

"Dumbledore shared with me his guesses, but he cannot be entirely correct," said Severus. "If it is not too much to ask, how much did he get wrong? He believed your ultimate goal was to kidnap Potter-to

kill him in order to show the world the boy has no power over you."

"Not bad," said the Dark Lord, smiling his terrible lipless smile. "Two out of three isn't bad at all… but then, the old fool is sharper than most…

"You know, of course, that on the night I lost my powers and my body, I tried to kill the boy?" the Dark Lord said softly, his red eyes gazing upon a distance. "I did offer his mother the choice to flee, as you had requested, but she refused. So his mother died in the attempt to save him- and unwittingly provided him with a protection I admit I had not foreseen… I could not touch the boy."

The Dark Lord raised a white hand and twitched the skeletal fingers as though remembering an old injury.

"His mother left upon him the traces of her sacrifice," the Dark Lord continued. "This is old magic, I should have remembered it, I was foolish to overlook it… the miscalculation cost me dearly. My curse was deflected by the woman's foolish sacrifice, and it rebounded upon me. Aaah… pain beyond pain, Severus; nothing could have prepared me for it. I was ripped from my body, I was less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost… but still, I was alive. What I was, even I do not know… I, who have gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality. You know my goal- to conquer death. And now, I was tested, and it appeared that one or more of my experiments had worked… for I had not been killed, though the curse should have done it. Nevertheless, I was as powerless as the weakest creature alive and without the means to help myself…"

The Dark Lord continued his monologue on how he survived in Albania through the only power he had left: the ability to possess the bodies of others. He sometimes inhabited animals- usually snakes as it was his preference- but that was no better than being a pure spirit, apparently. Then Quirrell came to him, four years ago. Quirrell brought the Dark Lord to Hogwarts, and eventually the Dark Lord possessed him to better supervise his efforts to steal the stone. But his plan ultimately failed. He was thwarted, yet again, by Harry Potter.

"But through it I have gained some insight into the boy's powers,"

said the Dark Lord. "He had an interesting turn of mind and a curious ability… the ability to drain magic. This can be the only reason why he can make Muggle trinkets work in Hogwarts and recover from a stunning spell without any outside aid."

Then the Dark Lord's mouth curled into another cruel smile.

"Tell me, Snape, is the boy's health still fragile?" he asked.

"He requires five different potions daily to maintain it," Severus answered. "I, unfortunately, am no longer in charge of brewing them. It seems Dumbledore wanted to… remove me from certain temptations."

"Yes, I heard your hatred for the boy is strong," said the Dark Lord, sounding satisfied. "It is fortunate that you didn't succeed in poisoning him. Otherwise my second plan for return would have faced a serious setback…"

The Dark Lord then continued his previous monologue. He had almost lost hope after another year and a half in the forests of Albania, but then, on New Year's Eve, Wormtail and Barty Crouch, Jr. came to him.

"It was the perfect birthday present," the Dark Lord mused. "One Death Eater, perfectly loyal to me, and another, though a poor wizard, able-bodied and capable of following directions…"

Through the combined efforts of Crouch and Wormtail, the Dark Lord was able to create a rudimentary, weak body he could inhibit while awaiting the essential ingredients for true rebirth. With a few spells of his own invention, and a potion concocted from unicorn blood and the snake venom taken from his newly acquired pet Nagini, he almost returned to human form, and strong enough to travel. But his difficulties had only just started.

He couldn't hope to steal the Philosopher's Stone again, as he was certain Dumbledore would have seen it destroyed. So instead of seeking immortality directly, he chose to set his sight to regaining his old body and old strength, before resuming his old goal. To achieve this, he required three powerful ingredients. One he already had:

Flesh of a servant, willingly given. Wormtail had a hand to give and he gave it as payment for his treachery only hours ago. The second was the bone of his father. This led him to the place his father was buried. How convenient he was already dead. But the third ingredient, blood of a foe, was tricky…

"Wormtail would have had me use any wizard," said the Dark Lord. "Any wizard who had hated me… and many of them still do. But I knew the one I must use, if I was to rise again, more powerful than I had been when I had fallen. I wanted Harry Potter's blood. I wanted the blood of the one who had stripped me of power thirteen years ago… for the lingering protection his mother once gave him and his ability to drain magic would then reside in my veins as well…

"But how to get Harry Potter? He is far better protected than I think even he knows, protected in ways devised by Dumbledore long ago, when it fell to him to arrange the boy's future. Dumbledore invoked an ancient magic, to ensure the boy's protection as long as he was in his relations' care. I thought this protection dissolved when they died, but no: Dumbledore had somehow managed to transfer the old blood protection to Potter's new guardians. Not even I can touch him in his new London home."

Severus frowned at this.

"Of course, there was the Quidditch World Cup," the Dark Lord continued. "I thought his protection might be weaker there, away from his guardians and Dumbledore, but I was not yet strong enough to attempt kidnap in the midst of a horde of Ministry wizards. And then, the boy would return to Hogwarts, where he is under the crooked nose of that Muggle-loving fool from morning until night. So how could I take him?"

The Dark Lord told Severus how he, Wormtail and Crouch returned to the latter's estate and put Crouch's father under the Imperius Curse. Through Crouch, Sr. they were able to learn about the Triwizard Tournament, Bertha Jorkin's knowledge of Crouch, Jr. and her summer plans. Crouch, Jr. arranged her assassination in Albania-the incompetent wizard he hired being more than capable of killing people from a distance, apparently-and then made his father go about his usual Ministry business. Dumbledore was correct that

the Dark Lord had intended to make Harry Potter compete, ensure he won the tournament-that he touch the Triwizard Cup first-so the cup, which Crouch would turn into a portkey, would bring him to the Dark Lord's waiting arms.

"But even this plan almost failed," said the Dark Lord. "Wormtail's blunder would have ruined everything-everything!-had not the boy been in charge of broadcasting the Triwizard Tournament. Even Crouch, loyal and resourceful, failed me many times. He failed to bring the boy to me at the first task, and then he revealed himself to Dumbledore during the Yule Ball. It was pure luck his old House-elf came to visit him when it heard about his father's troubles… he had the presence of mind to order the elf to bring Potter to him, but made the blunder of telling the elf he needed Potter's *blood* . The elf thus brought only the blood, not the boy!

"I was torn: On the one hand, Crouch procured what I needed in order to restore my old body. On the other hand, I did not have Harry Potter himself. I knew the elf spoke the truth when it had said it had taken the blood directly from Harry Potter. Harry Potter could not stop her because he was ill. Nevertheless the elf had not brought the boy as Crouch ordered. I had no use for an elf that does not obey its masters. So I had it disposed of."

The Dark Lord flared his slit like nostrils, and his red eyes were blank and pitiless.

"For days I brooded," said the Dark Lord. "Should I use the blood, or should Crouch attempt to bring the boy to me again during the second task? Crouch had proved himself loyal, but unreliable. Also, that the elf had known its master was in trouble seemed to suggest Dumbledore was very close to foiling my plans. So I used the blood… and here I am, as you see me…"

The Dark Lord stood tall with smug satisfaction. Severus stood quietly in attention, waiting for his cue.

"Any additional remarks, Snape?" asked the Dark Lord.

"… There is one thing," said Severus, after a long beat. "Your entire rebirth process-from the moment Wormtail placed you inside the

cauldron and cut off his hand, to the time you rose from the Cauldron with your old body-has been broadcasted over the Magical Mobile Network.

"But I think my Lord need not worry too much," Severus added as the Dark Lord wiped around in fury. "The Minister for Magic is inclined to believe the broadcast was fake footage a user concocted and sent through the Magical Mobile Network as a tasteless prank. He even went so far as to put the blame on the owner of the Magical Mobile Network for allowing such a thing to happen. So it seems, once again, fate has taken your side."

"Well, Severus, I am very glad to see you return in one piece."

That was the first remark Dumbledore made after Severus Snape shakily entered his office just before sundown. Severus grabbed the drink Dumbledore offered and downed in one go.

"Define 'one piece' and we can discuss how wrong you are," Severus snarled after wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

Dumbledore's expression turned grave. "He didn't like your information?"

"He liked it well enough. There was a slight problem in the presentation process."

"Oh, Severus, what happened?"

Severus told Dumbledore how he presented the facts in the order that he gave them. Dumbledore shook his head when he finished.

"It is unfortunate you had to mention the broadcast," said Dumbledore. "But considering the huge uproar it created in our world, it would have been unwise to keep it from him. Did Lord Voldemort ask you how it was filmed?"

"No, he was too upset," said Severus sarcastically.

"Excellent," said Dumbledore grimly. "Then let it remain a mystery to

him for now."

"So you will not tell me how Ms. Shin gained the footage?" asked Severus.

"I am not in liberty to talk about it. I'm sorry, Severus, it's more than my magic's worth."

Severus fumed.

"But for what it is worth, I can tell you that it set the stage to our advantage," said Dumbledore.

"How?" Severus growled. "You know the official stance and popular belief is that the footage is a *fake* ."

"Our world has a reason to believe Lord Voldemort has returned," said Dumbledore. "This by itself won't be enough to persuade those who do not wish to believe, but one cannot say there is no reason. That's a good start."

"Your optimism is inspiring," said Severus, heavy with sarcasm. "So what are you up to now?"

"I have a chat with Sherlock that is overdue," said Dumbledore. "I also need to get kidnapped."

"… By whom?!"

"A certain Muggle civil servant," said Dumbledore as he checked his pocket watch. "Speaking of which, I am overdue for that as well. Do try to sleep well, Severus. I'll see you in the morning."

And with that, Dumbledore went swiftly away.

Final Notes : You can either read this as the epilogue of GOF or prologue of OOTP. Whichever the case, I hope it clears up several things I was not able to cover in GOF proper.

ETA: though I have finished covering all necessary GOF material as

of this chapter, fourth year in ASIM isn't over! You'll get details about the Triwizard Tournament in the later chapters (no longer as relevant to the case, but who knows…)

Mind Games

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Sixty Nine: Mind Games

In the sitting room of 221B, an assortment of chairs plus one couch were arranged in a large circle around the coffee table, which was moved closer to the centre. A cheerful fire crackled in the fireplace, and a fancy tea set lay on the sitting room table, ready to serve tea at any moment. The sitting room was otherwise devoid of human presence, though one could hear the muffled sound of raised voices through the ceiling:

"How come I don't get to attend the meeting?!"

"You're too young!"

"So what?! Voldemort doesn't care how old I am! He probably wants to kill me before my next birthday or something…"

"You know, Benedict needs a minder-"

"No, he doesn't! He can join us too! It's not like he can understand what we're saying…"

"You cannot rule out the possibility that he comprehends language, but his vocalization skills need more development. Now if you find

being the only one left out is too objectionable, Sirius and Remus can stay with you. They don't have anything useful to contribute anyway."

"… *What did you say* ?!"

The multitude of voices argued for quite some time. Eventually the voices tapered off, and the sound of feet trooping down a flight of stairs echoed through the flat. Then the door to the sitting room opened and Sherlock and John walked in. The two headed to the arrangement of chairs and each claimed a seat.

"Thank you for putting your foot down, John," said Sherlock as he settled into his customary leather armchair.

"Don't thank me. We're going to pay for this later," John sighed after collapsing onto the couch. "He's going to sulk for a week, I just know it. Doesn't that remind me of someone…"

"Environmental factors are not as strong as you are currently implying," Sherlock chided. Then he checked his watch and clicked his tongue irritably. "They're late! Why are they late?!"

"You can't be late if there was no agreed time," said John sensibly. "So who are we expecting?"

"Dumbledore, Lestrade, Shin," said Sherlock, whilst drumming his fingers impatiently on the armrest, "and one unwanted but nevertheless invited guest…"

"Who?"

That moment, there was quiet knock on the door. A tall, middle-aged man wearing Italian leather shoes and a three-piece bespoke suit under a finely-cut overcoat stood at the threshold when it opened. John's face dropped at the sight.

"Yes, him," said Sherlock, sighing dramatically.

"Good eve to you too, little brother," drawled Mycroft Holmes. Then he raised an eyebrow towards the ceiling, from which furious stomping sounds could be heard.

"That's Harry demonstrating his maturity," said John, after a beat, "thus his suitability to attend this meeting. Sound like a delicate butterfly, doesn't he?"

"The size of Ireland?" said Mycroft ironically.

"I was thinking Africa, but that would do too. So why'd you invite your brother, Sherlock?"

"He's planning to kidnap an attendee-Dumbledore, probably- so I'm saving him the trouble," said Sherlock as he sent a glare at Mycroft. "Don't get too comfortable."

Mycroft smirked and seated himself in the red armchair like a man thoroughly at ease.

No one spoke in the wait that followed. Mycroft idly toyed with his umbrella, Sherlock strummed his violin and John watched the screen of a baby monitor, through which one could observe Benedict rolling around in his crib, yowling.

There was another knock at the door, and Lestrade and his father-in-law, Mr. Shin, were there.

"Tea party?" said Lestrade sarcastically as he took off his coat.

John nodded. "I'm playing mother."

Mr. Shin snorted. He then sat next to Lestrade, who took the empty spot on the couch next to John. Mr. Shin politely refused the tea John offered, and opted to drink an unidentifiable steaming liquid he kept inside a thermos. John asked Mr. Shin if the liquid was oolong or green tea and Mr. Shin told her he wasn't drinking tea.

Another tense silence filled in the sitting room after the first attempt at small talk died a painful death. Then the sitting room door opened for a third time and at the doorway stood a tall, thin man with waist-length silver hair and beard. Half-moon spectacles were perched on his crooked nose, and he was wearing a long black travelling cloak and a pointed wizard's hat.

"Good evening," said Albus Dumbledore at his staring audience. "I

daresay that I am expected?"

"… Yes, hello," said John, after taking in the blatant wizardishness of Dumbledore's attire. "You know, if I'd known you weren't going to bother hiding the wizard, I would have ditched the baby monitor."

"My apologies, but I did not expect Mr. Mycroft Holmes," said Dumbledore pleasantly. "At any rate, I do not think keeping secrecy in this front is necessary. Evidence suggests to do so in front of the Holmes Brothers would be trying one's luck to the point of foolishness."

"Likewise," drawled Mycroft.

"You flatter me," said Dumbledore as he made a short bow. "It has been a long time since our last conversation, Mr. Holmes. I must say, you look leaner than you did last."

Sherlock put on the most malicious smirk.

"Did you hear that, Mycroft? You actually found a diet that lets you lose weight."

"Yes, it is quite the celebratory occasion," said Mycroft dryly. Then to Dumbledore he said, "Do join us, Headmaster. We shan't keep you long, I think."

"Thank you," said Dumbledore.

He stepped smartly over the threshold and closed the door behind him. Once he joined the circle of chairs, Sherlock rapped his armrest.

"We are here to discuss LV War part II," Sherlock began imperiously. "All meanderings and useless speculation will be cut off with extreme prejudice as we haven't the time; we do have a five-month-old."

"Will there be baby pictures at the end?" asked Dumbledore hopefully.

Sherlock threw a teacup at him. With a casual flick of his wand,

Dumbledore turned it into a canary. The yellow song bird flew over to Sherlock and circled around his head, twittering cheerfully.

Mr. Shin reached over and patted John's arm consolingly while Mycroft chuckled and Sherlock demanded John her gun.

"I can turn them into potted plants," he quietly offered.

"Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme?" John growled.

Mr. Shin nodded once, "Done."

"Oh, that won't do," said Dumbledore, looking quite amused.

There was a second twitch of the wand. The canary vanished, and a dusty bottle and six glasses appeared in midair. The bottle tipped and poured a generous measure of honey-coloured liquid into each of the glasses, which then floated to each person in the room.

"Madam Rosmerta's finest oak-matured mead," said Dumbledore, raising his glass.

"What is this, a refreshments potluck?" Lestrade grumbled as he caught hold of his glass. He then spilled mead all over his hand when Mr. Shin kicked him. Sherlock took both his and John's glasses, but didn't drink either, though John looked at it rather longingly.

"Well, then," said Dumbledore, after taking a sip. "I apologise for the interruption. As Sherlock said, we are here to discuss the aftermath of Lord Voldemort's return. Namely, the burning question: what will he do now?"

There was a nodding of heads. Mycroft did so whilst scribbling something on his shirt cuff and blithely ignoring the glass of mead gently nudging his head.

"So this… *Voldemort* character- he obtained what he so desperately sought," asked Mycroft phlegmatically.

"Quite so," said Dumbledore. "But the object he sought was contaminated prior to its abduction. We do not yet know all

ramifications of this, but I do believe Voldemort is feeling the effects right now."

"Joy," said John sardonically. "Too bad it didn't kill him."

"Yes, that would have prevented a great deal of future heartache," said Dumbledore sombrely.

Sherlock rolled his eyes and Mycroft's eyes glittered over the brim of his glass, which he had finally taken.

"Oh stop being coy and just tell us everything," Sherlock grumbled. "You already gave away the fact the thing LV wanted was something that he needed to *consume* ."

Mycroft sighed. "Why must you be so intransigent?"

"I am not here to play games, Mycroft," Sherlock snapped. "So will LV proceed as is or will he seek a second weapon?"

"You have hit the nerve of the problem, Sherlock," said Dumbledore. " *Will* Lord Voldemort seek a second weapon? He did not have the opportunity to test his first weapon, and right now he may feel it is not enough for his purposes. But if he decides to look for a second weapon, what weapon would he seek?"

"Why don't you tell us?" said Lestrade, waving his glass. "What do *you* think?"

"I'm afraid this is where Secrecy enters the picture, Greg," said Dumbledore. "Neither June Hu nor I can discuss its exact nature with our current audience."

"Isn't that convenient," muttered Lestrade. "So what are the chances of a follow up meeting? Zero? Negative fifty?" he went quiet when Mr. Shin kicked him again.

"Surely you can deduce a few things about it," said Dumbledore, smiling and nodding at Sherlock and Mycroft.

"Known," said Sherlock promptly.

"To those connected to the government, Sherlock, only to them," Mycroft clarified. "Not exactly public knowledge, but those who have the security clearance or have a connection to such people are aware of its existence. That's obvious surely."

"Transparent," Sherlock agreed. "It can be either an object that causes destruction or knowledge equally damaging."

"Also something a thirty-person strong terrorist group that has moles in the government can access and operate," Mycroft added.

"Wait a minute, how did you get the number thirty?" Lestrade demanded.

"I glanced through the index Sherlock made on Voldemort's past followers, Chief Inspector," said Mycroft. "It was easy enough to count the ones who are alive and free."

"What did your mummy say about stealing your little brother's things?" said John, eyes narrowed.

Mycroft shrugged. "It was of national importance. Now the last thing one can deduce is that the weapon is stored in an undisclosed, static location-a government facility, of course. These are deductions so obvious, I do not think it is necessary to belabour over the reasoning process. The counter-strategy, too, is equally obvious."

"Up the security?" guessed John.

"That would be a waste," sneered Mycroft. "You are facing government resistance and lack of public knowledge, are you not? Trying to up security without the cooperation of either party is a fool's errand. Trying to fight a battle with multiple fronts is also a loser's game, especially when you are in a defensive position and are vastly outnumbered. What you need to do is create an *event* -a shocking, public event that makes Voldemort's return undeniable. What better way than allow him to infiltrate a supposedly secure government facility holding a deadly weapon and attack him once he enters?"

"So you're suggesting an ambush," said John. "I guess that makes more logistical sense."

"Just so," said Mycroft, nodding. To Dumbledore he said rather condescendingly: "Even if you have not considered this stratagem, I don't think you will have problems filling out the details."

"No," said Mr. Shin curtly, making everyone look. "We just need to let Voldemort know when security is down. That can be arranged."

Mycroft sniffed delicately. "Good. Time to move on, then."

"Move on to *what* ?" asked Lestrade mutinously.

"Well, you didn't invite me here for just trivia, did you?" said Mycroft.

"Indeed, no," said Dumbledore, who's bright blue eyes still lingered on Shin. "You must know from past records that when Voldemort is active, his destructive influences always spill over to your world."

"So you seek my cooperation?"

"Of course."

"I do not have as much power over the government as you think," said Mycroft, a subtle smirk playing on his lips. "To influence the relevant agencies, I need proper justification for the additional expense. Hiding your daily indiscretions is costly enough as it is."

"Therefore you need an incentive," said Dumbledore.

Mycroft raised his glass.

"The kind of incentive you seek I cannot give," said Dumbledore calmly. "But I can give you some advice: if you have not already, stopping using the blood."

Mycroft's expression slowly transformed to that of a plaster bust.

"The most curious thing happened last summer," said Dumbledore, fingertips touching. "A newborn infant required three transfusions of Magus positive blood. Though one regular adult blood unit can

create six pediatric blood units, the hospital collected *three* adult units of Magus positive blood for that one infant. Then, after the infant was released, those adult units were removed from storage for disposure. While I understand blood products are perishable, it seems rather strange that the blood donated by our kind were disposed of so quickly."

Mycroft remained perfectly steady. Lestrade, on the other hand, sputtered at him in outraged disbelief.

"Blood has a long history of use among our kind," Dumbledore went on. "I myself am not an expert in this field, but I know enough about it to draw some conclusions on what may happen if you use it without the owner's permission. Still, if you prefer the opinions of an expert, we have one right here. June Hu?"

"Life is in the blood," said Mr. Shin monotonously. "Do not bother to question this. The exercise is about as useful as questioning the intelligibility of the universe. If you take that which belongs to a person without his or her say-so, you are stealing. You know what stealing life is, don't you?"

Mycroft shrugged, "A regrettable fact of this world."

"That doesn't make it right," said Mr. Shin severely. "You must know there are consequences to stealing. The power we possess has the property of making truth overt. In this case, you must forfeit something of equal value."

"Take away the life of someone else, you must forfeit yours," Dumbledore concurred. "Among our kind, the forfeiture manifests itself as a profound instability in the thief's essence-his or her soul is compromised, in other words. It may not kill us outright, as our power has a preservative effect, but rare is the person who lives long after committing this sort of act."

Dumbledore looked at Mycroft over his half-moon glasses.

"I will let you imagine what would happen if one of your own kind commits it," he finished.

"Can you hear anything?" asked Harry.

Sirius, who had transformed into a dog to better eavesdrop, shook his head before transforming back.

"I think they're using an Imperturbable Charm," Sirius grumbled.

Harry groaned. Benedict, whom Harry was holding, made a noise that was possibly an imitation of it.

"Yeah, I know, it's so weird," Harry grumbled to his little brother. "Normally they get told off for letting me do dangerous stuff…"

Harry, Sirius and Remus passed time speculating what the downstairs meeting attendees were discussing. Benedict started to scream and cry as they were warming up to the more absurd ideas and the sound brought John upstairs.

"They're still at it," said John as she consoled Benedict. "It's Sherlock and Mycroft verses Dumbledore right now."

Harry felt his eyes go wide as it dawned on him there were three geniuses in the same room, each possessing different temperaments and goals, trying to one-up each other. *Will we survive this?* He wondered.

"Yeah, they're taking friendly-fire to a whole new level," John remarked dryly. "Harry and Benedict, just in case their talk leaves nothing but a giant crater where 221B used to be with purple gay ponies frolicking about: Mummy loves you. Daddy loves you too. Probably."

John didn't rejoin the meeting, but remained in Harry's room even after Benedict calmed down. Mr. Lestrade sent a text to John in the meantime, and it simply said: *I'm out of here* .

It was quite late at night when Sherlock joined Harry, John, Sirius and Remus.

"They're gone," he said simply. "Remus, Dumbledore says: come back to work, work meaning Hogwarts."

"Really?" said Remus, looking mildly surprised. "I would've thought he'd want me to contact the werewolf community."

"He says your fellow test subjects are better suited for the job," said Sherlock. To Sirius he ordered: "Go back to work."

Sirius groaned.

"Harry, I'm going to debrief you on the meeting," Sherlock went on.

"If you're going to tell me what the meeting was about anyway, why didn't you let me attend?" Harry said indignantly.

Sherlock gave Harry the 'are-you-really-this-stupid' look.

"Dumbledore is frugal with his information and your presence only makes it worse," he said. "Banning you from attending the meeting would've put him at ease, as it would appear that I think it is best we keep the information away from you. Furthermore, the best way to get information out of Dumbledore is putting him in a setting where there are individuals who can think his thoughts after him, since he never outright lies and will confirm if you are correct.

"Is that the other reason why you invited Mycroft?" asked John.

Sherlock nodded once. "Dumbledore no doubt planned to confront Mycroft and vice versa. Best do it where we can observe it."

"Where *you* can observe it, you mean," said John in fond exasperation. "Well, from what little I heard, I can tell you were correct. But wouldn't Dumbledore know what you're up to? Mind-reading and all that."

"He might guess, but he won't know," said Sherlock confidently.

"Why not?" said Sirius.

"There are two different methods of mind reading," said Sherlock, palms under his chin. "Grandmaster Shin practices a passive-receptive type, which involves 'hearing' thoughts as they circulate through the mind. Dumbledore and Snape practice an active-intrusive type that requires eye contact. So far, obvious."

"… Obvious?" John muttered.

"Both have their own limitations," Sherlock continued. "The latter method allows you to rifle through a person's mind and bring up more memories in addition to the ones you are thinking, but as I said before, eye contact is necessary. It also doesn't work on John or Harry."

"It doesn't?" said John, startled. "How do you know this?"

"The greatest con of the latter method is that the target can feel the intrusion," said Sherlock. "Have you two ever felt like your mind was intruded into?"

John shook her head in the negative. Harry, on the other hand, nodded and said, "I did. Sometimes when Dumbledore looks at me, I feel like I am being x-rayed. Snape, too."

"Do you remember the first time you felt this?" Sherlock asked.

"Errr, second year in November, just after you figured out the Monster of Slytherin is a Basilisk," Harry replied. "Dumbledore called me to his office and I felt it when he looked at me."

"Was he surprised when he learned you picked up self-duplication in order to locate the Chamber of Secrets?"

"Mmm, yeah," said Harry, frowning thoughtfully.

"I thought as much," said Sherlock with grim satisfaction. "If Dumbledore or Snape were able to read your mind, then they would've known how you were planning to uncover the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. Dumbledore may have let you work it out on your own, but Snape would not. Conclusion: their method of mind-reading does not work on you."

Harry nodded slowly. But then he frowned. "But why? Why doesn't it work?"

Sherlock put his hand into the neck opening of his shirt and pulled out his dog-tags, hanging on a ball chain.

" *Oh* !" Harry and John exclaimed. Sirius and Remus, too, gaped as soon as Harry showed them his own dog-tags.

"I don't wear this as often as Harry," said Sherlock, as he tucked the chain back in his shirt. "But lately I've been wearing it whenever I meet magic people. I conducted a few experiments and discovered as long as I'm wearing this, neither Dumbledore nor Snape can read my mind."

John thought about this for a second.

"So the tags let you keep your thoughts away from Dumbledore," said John. "But what about Mr. Shin? He can read my mind and I'm pretty sure he can read Harry's."

"His method works by proximity," said Sherlock. "Once you are outside the range, he can't read you."

John set her arms apart to estimate the distance between Sherlock and Mr. Shin's seats.

"Two meters?" guessed John.

"Roughly," Sherlock confirmed. "He wouldn't have known my plans through you, and he wouldn't sit next to me, he hates me."

"He was certainly fighting the urge to turn you into a pot of sage," John retorted, "But why all this secrecy? Don't you trust Dumbledore?"

" *Trust him* ?" scoffed Sherlock. "John, I can trust him to comprehend the intricacies of magic like no other-LV or Shin may possibly win him in a magic battle, but in terms of magical knowledge, he really is second to none. I can also trust his dedication to eradicate LV and his ilk for the greater good. I can even trust him to have ours and Harry's best interests in mind."

"But?" John prompted.

"Can I trust him to properly balance these different priorities together?" said Sherlock grimly, " *No* . Absolutely not."

Final Notes : In terms of teeth-pulling qualities, writing this chapter trumps many. Sherlock and Mycroft are just too clever. They practically revealed the whole plot of OOTP whenever I let them talk too long. ARGH.

Plan of Attack

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy: Plan of Attack

Harry returned to Hogwarts after Sherlock debriefed him on the LV War part II preparation meeting. Ron, Neville, Hermione, Julia and Ginny were waiting for him at the fireplace he used to travel back and forth to London. All five of them looked grim yet composed when Harry stumbled out, scattering soot all over the floor.

"Welcome back, Harry," said Ron.

"Good to be back," said Harry as he brushed off the soot clinging to his school robes.

There was a brief pause as the six of them looked at each other's faces grimly.

"Ready?" said Harry, looking them all.

"Ready," said Neville firmly. "Let's go."

They headed to the Great Hall. Almost every single student they met in the corridors stared as they walked pass.

"How is Miss Jackie doing?" Harry asked as they walked across the empty entrance hall.

"She got a few Howlers and about a hundred letters of complaints," said Ron, shrugging his shoulders, "Nothing unexpected."

"That's not too bad," said Harry. "So did we get any word from the Ministry?"

"Percy sent us an Owl," said Ginny. "He wanted to know how it happened. He also hinted that there's going to be an inquiry- again, nothing unexpected."

Harry nodded grimly as Hermione opened the doors to the Great Hall.

A sudden hush seemed to fall upon the Hall's occupants as Harry and his friends walked in. Harry could feel the multitude of eyes staring at him as he walked towards the Gryffindor table. From the corner of his eye, he could see the Slytherins pointing and hissing.

The quiet lasted until he reached the Gryffindor table. Almost predictably, it was Fred and George Weasley who broke the tension.

"Harry, *what happened to your hair* !?" Fred shouted.

Harry smiled wryly at his fellow Gryffindors, who were now openly gawking, gibbering and pointing at him… More specifically, pointing and gawking at his *hair*, which was now heavily streaked with white.

"Dunno," Harry answered. "I woke up this morning and found my hair like this…"

Six days before Harry showed up in Hogwarts sporting salt-and-pepper hair - which was also the day after Winky the house-elf took Harry's blood and the evening Mr. Lestrade information Harry, John and Sherlock the Aurors were investigating Barty Crouch, Sr.'s murder- Harry had another vision of Lord Voldemort. It showed him Voldemort raging at Crouch, Jr. for bringing only Harry's blood and not Harry himself. When he woke up from the terrible vision, he found Sherlock and John watching his memory of the vision via his MMN phone.

"How did you…?" Harry started to ask.

"Where were we the last time you used this paper charm to show us your vision of LV?" said Sherlock as John waved Harry's memory harvesting charm.

Harry smiled sheepishly, "So now what? Tell Dumbledore?"

"No," said Sherlock. "First, we plan."

John took Benedict from Sherlock, who clasped his palms under his chin.

"LV now has what he needs to fully resurrect his body," Sherlock began. "The chances are high he'll use it, though we can't rule out the possibility he might use the second task to kidnap you."

"Won't he know better than to try, since Crouch is dead and people know it?" said John.

"It would be absolutely foolish if he tries, yes, but the agent may attempt to replace someone else in a desperate act of contrition," said Sherlock. "However, LV has five days to brood over his options. I highly doubt he'll let the agent pick the foolish one when he isn't pressed in time."

"So we should expect him to use the blood," said John grimly. "What do we do?"

"Prepare for an uphill battle," Sherlock declared. "Unlike us, the public has no earthly clue Voldemort has spent an entire year engineering his return and has succeeded. All they *do* know is that Death Eater Peter Pettigrew is still at large and that Barty Crouch, Sr. was found murdered in his back garden. They likely will not see the connection between these two facts, unless the Ministry announces Crouch was the person who was Imperiused to help Pettigrew escape."

Harry and John nodded.

"We can expect the Ministry of Magic to downplay Crouch's murder case and keep his past a secret since both are an embarrassment to

the current administration," Sherlock went on. "Thankfully we have Jacqueline, who will not let this happen. She will report the grievously disturbing news at great length and detail-especially the fact Crouch had been Imperiused two Christmases ago and was manipulated to help Pettigrew escape. This will bridge the connection we want in the minds of the public and bring LV back to the forefront of their minds."

"But that won't be enough," said John.

"Obviously," said Sherlock. "Therefore the Wizarding World must receive *another* dose of disturbing news. That one is easy, we have one pending already."

"We do?" said Harry blankly.

"Think, Harry," said Sherlock impatiently. "LV is on the cusp of success. Not exactly the success he envisioned, but a success nevertheless. Now picture him as he prepares for his rebirth and comeback. He will feel excited, nervous and anxious. In short, his emotions will run high. You know what happens when his emotions are at such a height."

Harry felt his hands turn cold and clammy as it all clicked.

"… I dream about it."

Sherlock nodded curtly.

"I don't expect him to brood for long-a week at most. But in due time I expect you to have a vision of LV's rebirth. Your memory of that vision is the second dose of disturbing news we need to give to the Wizarding World… and the first step to announcing his return."

Harry and John nodded slowly.

"So we have a newscast that will jolt the wizarding world," said John. "Hopefully it won't cause collective panic attack and heart failure. Now answer me this: how are we going to convince the average wizard that what they're seeing is *LV* resurrecting? I don't think they know what he looks like and even if they did, chances are this resurrection spell LV is planning to use is going to alter his looks-for

better or worse. Also, how are we going to explain where and how we got the footage? We can't let LV know Harry has a direct connection to his brain."

"Thank you for the succinct summary of all the problems we're facing, John," said Sherlock, heavy with sarcasm. Then more sombrely, he said: "We will have to decide the best way to broadcast LV's rebirth *after* we see the vision. Not the best, but it can't be helped. As for the newscast itself, we must put as much distance between the source of the news and us. Alienating the public would only hinder our efforts to ultimately destroy LV, and chances are the public will lash out against the persons responsible for feeding them bad news. In fact, depending on the public reaction to the news of Crouch's murder, we may have to delay broadcasting LV's rebirth indefinitely."

"But we still need to warn them," said Harry. "And if you were planning to work in secret, you wouldn't even mention broadcasting Voldemort's return."

Sherlock smirked. "So you understand that we must turn public opinion. Good. You are ready for the warning, then. Expect greater resistance to the idea of LV's return after we show them his rebirth."

" *Why* ?" said Harry, taken aback. "They'll see him coming back! How much more obvious can it get?"

"What do normal people do when they face too much bad news?" asked Sherlock.

Harry just blinked at the question.

"Go into denial," said John, answering for Harry. "Seeing doesn't mean believing, no matter what people say. Convincing a person in denial is bloody difficult, if not impossible. Hopefully the Wizarding World won't stay in denial for long, but for now let's claim the right to say 'I told you so'."

"But we don't have the *time* !" exclaimed Harry. "Voldemort isn't going to dither around! And why would anyone deny it, they'll *see* Voldemort returning! He won't even look human, so who else could

they think they're-"

" *Harry*," said John, interrupting, "Think about it: there are students out there who lost aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins thanks to LV. A few of them even lost parents. They all know who the murderer is and for the last fourteen years they believed he was gone for good. But now we're going to tell them, with very little prior warning that he's *back* . This is about the worst news you'll ever get. It's like telling someone the cancer that went into remission years ago developed metastases and now they're in stage four. Are you going to tell this person: 'You're being stupid; just accept the facts,' and then shove the biopsy report in her face?"

Harry looked down. "… No."

"Good to know you won't. I've actually met people who said that they'd do that in medical school," John sighed. "We'll have to do this carefully. First we have to get people to think the footage is a record of a *real* event. Then we can talk about the content. It's going to be tough, but we've got to do it."

"Okay," said Harry, sighing, "What about the footage? How are we going to explain where we got it?"

"We won't," said Sherlock, smirking horribly.

John frowned. "But they're going to ask, Harry has to-"

"They won't ask," said Sherlock confidently. "In fact, if everything goes according to plan, no one will think to ask *us* where we got the footage from."

John's frown deepened. "How? What are you up to?"

Sherlock told them. When he finished talking, John and Harry were both speechless.

"That-" John started.

"Was brilliant? Excellent? Clever?" said Sherlock, looking impish.

"I was going to say that I can see your plan going horribly *wrong*,"

John growled.

Sherlock looked offended. "Why?"

"There are too many contingencies! And you're making Harry do almost everything!" John shouted.

"Yes, so?" said Sherlock irritably.

"Backup plans would be nice," John snapped. "At the very least, get other people involved. We should do something, too."

"We *are* doing something," Sherlock retorted. "If you want more direct action, then let me ask you: How are we going to take them? In case you've forgotten, John, we're *Muggles* ."

"What about the kids?" John argued, "Arthur and Molly? Lestrade? Jack? Especially Jack, since you're risking her business and reputation here."

"Jacqueline won't mind," said Sherlock dismissively. "She looked delighted when I told her she might lose the MMN in the end."

John looked like she wanted to punch him. "Of course she'd say that. What else would she say?"

Sherlock waved a hand dismissively. "Don't worry. I have full confidence in Harry. He can pull it off."

Then he pinned his most intense stare on Harry.

"I will *make sure* he pulls it off," Sherlock muttered ominously.

What happened in the eight hours that followed made Harry consider running away from 221B for the first time in his life. At the end, Harry was exhausted but too mentally-wired to sleep, as his brain was buzzing with scenarios and speeches Sherlock made him remember and practice.

Harry returned to Hogwarts the next day, which was a Sunday, at around noon. He quickly discovered the whole school was buzzing over the news of Bartemius Crouch, Sr.'s murder. Harry was

surprised at the sheer number of people interested in the case, but then, as Hermione reminded him, Crouch *was* one of the Triwizard Tournament judges. Harry kept his mouth resolutely shut for the remainder of the day while everyone speculated and asked him questions, as per Sherlock's instructions. Then, on Monday evening after classes, he headed off to meet his Hufflepuff friends in the library, ostensibly to do his Herbology homework with them.

He didn't even get to unfurl a roll of parchment. Ernie Macmillan went straight to the chase as soon as he sat down:

"So the Barty Crouch's murder case, what do you think happened, Harry?" he asked.

All of the other Hufflepuffs present-which included Zacharias Smith-looked at Harry expectantly.

"I'm not sure," said Harry, exactly as he practiced. "I mean the question is: who would want Crouch *dead* ? Killing someone isn't something you can do lightly, especially when that someone is a high-ranking Ministry official. A person might do it in the heat of the moment, but Crouch lives alone from what've heard."

"Maybe… someone didn't like the way he scored the Triwizard Champions?" said Justin tentatively.

Harry privately marvelled at the fact people could actually think this was a possible explanation.

"Murdering Crouch isn't going to help anyone win the Tournament," said Harry, shaking his head. "He marked the champions fairly. And if there's a judge someone might want to murder for biased scoring, it would be Karkaroff."

"Yeah, he gave Krum ten for the first task, didn't he?" said Ernie. "Even though he squashed half of the eggs…"

Harry nodded. "So anyway no, I don't think Crouch got murdered over the Triwizard Tournament."

"But what could it be?" said Hannah Abbott tremulously.

Harry pretended to think over it for exactly five seconds.

"I don't want to speculate," he said slowly to his breathless audience. "There's really not a lot to go on."

"But you have an idea," said Justin eagerly. "You must have something or you wouldn't say that."

Harry nodded. Then he drew in a deep breath.

"Did you know that Crouch was the person who sent Sirius Black to Azkaban without a trial?" Harry began.

Start with a shocking, publically verifiable fact, Sherlock had instructed Harry. *Something your fellow students can confirm for themselves. It will bolster your trustworthiness.*

Harry smiled wryly as Ernie, Justin & co. gasped in shock. "Crouch was…?" said Susan Bones weakly.

"Yeah," Harry confirmed. "He used to be the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, before your Aunt Amelia. Anyway, this means-" he swallowed, "-Sirius is one possible suspect."

Show them you are willing to consider all the possibilities, Sherlock had said. *You have to. Or else they will think you are biased.*

Ernie looked suitably horrified. "Isn't he your godfather?"

"He is," said Harry flatly. "That's why I had to really think about it. I mean, I don't want it to be him, but… well, I had to wonder."

The Hufflepuffs nodded wordlessly.

"He has an alibi, thankfully," Harry continued. "Crouch's body was transfigured to a bone. Meaning, the murderer cast a spell that would transfigure a human body to a bone. Sirius let the Aurors check his wand, and they verified it hadn't cast that kind of spell."

"How could they tell?" asked Justin.

" *Prior Incantato*," said Harry. "If you use this spell on a wand, it

shows you the spell the wand performed in reverse order."

"That doesn't mean *Black* didn't cast such a spell," argued Smith.

" *Smith* !" Susan and Ernie exclaimed, outraged.

"Yes, that's true," said Harry through gritted teeth. Even though he expected the objection, it still grated him deeply. "Sirius could've used someone else's wand. He might've even used *Crouch's* wand, just to make the irony thicker. But did you know it takes a very powerful wizard to properly use a wand that doesn't belong to him?"

Smith blinked, and so did several others.

"Mr. Ollivander told me," said Harry, looking pointedly at Smith, "that you will never get good results with another wizard's wand. I actually experimented with Julia's old wand to see if I'd have trouble, and," he shook his head. "It was no good. I couldn't get it to work. You should try it; it's a lot harder than you think. Here, you can use mine."

The Hufflepuffs openly goggled as Harry offered his wand to Smith. *Show them you did your research*, Sherlock had said. *Then challenge them to replicate your results. It will make them trust you more.*

Smith eventually took Harry's wand and tried to levitate his quill. Harry felt a deep sense of satisfaction when, try as Smith might, he couldn't get the spell to work.

"See?" said Harry as he took his wand back. "Also, for your information, the guards of Azkaban drain a wizard of his powers if he stays there for too long. Sirius was there for *twelve year* s. It's been almost two years since he left, but he still needs Magic Enhancement Therapy."

Smith voiced no more objections, though from the look on his face, Harry could tell he was not at all satisfied.

"Looks like it can't be your godfather, Harry," said Ernie solemnly. "I'm very glad to know that."

"I am too," said Harry. "But that still leaves the question: who did it?"

"Do you have any bright ideas on *that* ?" groused Zacharias Smith resentfully.

"Things are murky here," said Harry, as he levelled a glare at Smith. "Since Crouch was the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement when Vol- ehhh *You-Know-Who* was active, he has plenty of enemies. You could even include You-Know-Who himself as one. That makes the pool of suspects very large. But…"

" *But* ?" said Hannah breathlessly.

"There's common thread to all his enemies," said Harry.

"And that is…?"

"You-Know-Who," Harry declared.

Harry ended the discussion at that, even though he was bursting to say this could mean Lord Voldemort might be engineering his return. Sherlock had been adamant about this point, and drummed it into Harry's head that he must not go further. Harry *had* to establish himself as a trustworthy source of information and trustworthy people did not speculate beyond the available evidence. Also, any doubt towards Harry would only give Voldemort an advantage.

"We *cannot* let LV win," Sherlock had said vehemently. "I categorically refuse to let him win. So listen to me."

Harry had a very similar discussion with Terry Boot the next day. It was far easier to lead Terry to point where he saw the connection between Crouch's murder and Voldemort. In fact, Terry took an extra step and wondered if *Pettigrew* had anything to do with the case.

"Why did you think about Pettigrew?" asked Harry, trying not to sound too excited.

"He's still out there, isn't he?" said Terry. "And he is a Death Eater. He doesn't have anyone to turn to right now, except for You-Know-Who."

"Yeah," said Harry. "I do think he has a hand in it, but there's no evidence that can tell us what. And the reasons why Pettigrew would want Crouch dead are all scary."

"True," said Terry, shivering. "By the way, I can't believe the Hat didn't put you in Ravenclaw. You've definitely got the brains for it." He looked at Harry keenly. "Did the hat give you the option?"

"Eh, no, it actually offered Hufflepuff," said Harry truthfully.

" *Really* ? Huh, I wonder why…"

Harry focused on observing the residents of Hogwarts after his talk with Terry. The students' interest in Crouch's murder case waned as the Second Task approached, but they still talked about it, usually whilst wondering who was going to replace Crouch as a judge. During his silent watch, Harry couldn't help but notice an increasing number of students tried to cast spells using their friend's wands.

The days passed by slowly. Harry had trouble sleeping and had no dreams. In his madder moments, Harry wondered what Voldemort was waiting for and wished he get a move on. He couldn't tell his worry to his friends, as Sherlock said they couldn't risk their minds being read. They had the mind-blocking paper charms Mr. Shin made, of course, but anyone who had been actively trying to read their minds so far would become suspicious if he suddenly wasn't able to read them.

Then the day before the Second Task dawned. Harry, Ron and Miss Jackie headed to the lake after dinner, to prepare to film the Second Task unmanned. Harry couldn't film the task himself, as whatever method he used to follow the champions might help them fulfil their task and that was against the rules. Miss Jackie, with the help of Fred and George, had developed a waterproof spy-cam she could access remotely for this reason. These cameras couldn't swim, so Harry and Ron had to place them in strategic locations when no one was looking (hopefully).

Harry and Ron ate Gillyweed to go underwater. Ron looked revolted when he first laid his eyes on the ball of what looked like slimy, greyish-green rat tails. Chewing on it was awful, too-it felt

unpleasantly slimy and rubbery, like octopus tentacles. After swallowing, Harry and Ron waited for something to happen. They felt stupid, standing there at the bank in their florescent colour diving suits, which Miss Jackie insisted that they wear.

Then, quite suddenly, Harry felt as though an invisible pillow had been pressed over his mouth and nose. He tried to draw breath, but it made his head spin; his lungs were empty, and he suddenly felt a piercing pain on either side of his neck. Harry clapped his hands around his throat and felt two large slits just below his ears flapping in the cold air… *He had gills* .

Harry and Ron shared one look before they flung themselves into the lake.

A large gulp of water cleared Harry's head instantly. The icy water felt wonderfully cool to the skin. Harry looked around and marvelled at how clearly he could see. It was also strange because he felt no need to blink. When Harry tried to swim, he was astonished at how swiftly he could move. So he looked down at his feet and discovered they were elongated and webbed between the toes. Weird.

Once Harry and Ron got over their fascination towards their new flippers and gills, they went off to set up the cameras.

It took them two hours. It would've taken Harry and Ron less time if it weren't for the pack of grindylows that ambushed them halfway down, in the forest of black weeds. Harry used the Relashio charm on them, and, instead of sending sparks at the grindylows, the spell pelted them with what seemed to be a jet of boiling water, for where it struck them, angry red patches appeared on their green skin. Harry and Ron got lost after the grindylows stopped chasing them. After wandering around a bit, they got some unexpected help. Harry thought he was having a heart attack when he saw Moaning Myrtle floating hazily in front of him, gazing at him through her thick, pearly glasses.

"Myrtle!" Harry tried to shout- but nothing came out of his mouth except a very large bubble. Moaning Myrtle giggled at him.

"If you're looking for the merpeople village, you want to try over

there!" she said, pointing.

Ron wrote on the writing slate attached to his diving suit: *How do you know?!*

"I sometimes go down there," said Myrtle, "sometimes I don't have any choice, if someone flushes my toilet when I'm not expecting it…"

Harry and Ron shared a grin as they imagined Moaning Myrtle zooming down a pipe to the lake with the contents of a toilet. Harry took the writing slate from Ron and wrote: *Thanks, Myrtle!* Then they gave her the thumbs up and set off.

They found the merpeople village in the direction Myrtle pointed out. It looked like a cluster of crude stone dwellings stained with algae. The merpeople living there had greyish skin and long, wild, dark green hair. Their eyes were yellow, as were their broken teeth, and they wore thick ropes of pebbles around their necks. They leered at Harry and Ron as they swam past. One or two of them emerged from their caves to watch them better, their powerful, silver fish tails beating the water, spears clutched in their hands. Quite a few watched as Harry and Ron attached spy-cams all around their village-square and laughed unpleasantly when they struggled to put one on a gigantic merperson statue. Once they put all the cameras they had brought, Harry and Ron swam to shore.

"What was it like?" Miss Jackie asked when they broke the lake's surface, gasping and sputtering (they lost their gills and flippers on the way back).

"Creepy," said Ron.

"Eerie," Harry decided.

"Did you meet the giant squid?"

"We saw it at a distance," said Ron. "Didn't come near us, thank Merlin."

"The merpeople?"

Harry and Ron nodded fervently.

Miss Jackie looked wistful. "Would you go back?"

"Mmm, maybe," said Harry dubiously. "Maybe when it's lighter out…"

The three of them returned to the castle. Harry and Ron went straight to their dormitory, changed into their pyjamas and went to bed, as they were both feeling very heavy-limbed and exhausted. Harry heard Ron's snores in no time, and soon his own eyes started to droop…

…

… He stood in the darkness of an overgrown graveyard. The black outline of a small church was visible beyond a large yew tree to his right. A hill rose above them to his left. Harry could just make out the outline of a fine old house on the hillside. Then, suddenly, he saw a figure approaching. Harry squinted tensely through the darkness as the figure walked steadily toward him between the graves. Whoever it was, he was short, wearing a hooded cloak pulled up over his head to obscure his face, and in his arms he was carrying something… a baby? Or a bundle of robes?

The short man in the cloak stopped beside a towering marble headstone. He put down his bundle, and then pulled out a wand with a hand that had a finger missing. *Wormtail!* Harry thought numbly as the man lit his wand. Harry then saw the name upon the headstone, flickering in the wandlight, and felt like someone had punched his chest:

TOM RIDDLE

Wormtail left while Harry struggled to comprehend what he'd seen so far. When he came to, he saw Wormtail pushing a large stone cauldron full of liquid to the foot of the grave. It was larger than any cauldron Harry had ever used; a great stone belly large enough for a full-grown man to sit in. Wormtail quickly busied himself at the bottom of the cauldron. While he worked, the bundle at the grave stirred fretfully. Harry couldn't bear to look at it. Every time he did so, excruciating pain shot through his scar.

Suddenly there were crackling flames beneath the cauldron. The liquid in the cauldron heated very fast. The surface began not only to bubble, but sent out fiery sparks, as though it were on fire. Steam thickened, blurring the outline of Wormtail tending the fire. The movements beneath the robes became more agitated. Then Harry heard a high, cold voice.

" *Hurry* !"

The whole surface of the water was alight with sparks now. It might have been encrusted with diamonds.

"It is ready, Master."

" *Now*…" said the cold voice.

Wormtail pulled open the robes on the ground, revealing what was inside them.

It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone and revealed something ugly, slimy, and blind-but worse, a hundred times worse. The thing Wormtail had been carrying had the shape of a crouched human child, except that Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face-no child alive ever had a face like that-flat and snakelike, with gleaming red eyes.

The thing seemed almost helpless; it raised its thin arms, put them around Wormtail's neck, and Wormtail lifted it. As he did so, his hood fell back, and Harry saw the look of revulsion on Wormtail's weak, pale face in the firelight as he carried the creature to the rim of the cauldron. For one moment, Harry saw the evil, flat face illuminated in the sparks dancing on the surface of the potion. And then Wormtail lowered the creature into the cauldron. There was a hiss, and it vanished below the surface. Harry heard its frail body hit the bottom with a soft thud.

Wormtail then started speaking. His voice shook; he seemed frightened beyond his wits. He raised his wand, closed his eyes, and spoke to the night.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

The surface before the marble gravestone cracked. Horrified, Harry watched as a fine trickle of dust rose into the air at Wormtail's command and fell softly into the cauldron. The diamond surface of the water broke and hissed; it sent sparks in all directions and turned a vivid, poisonous-looking blue.

And now Wormtail was whimpering. He pulled a long, thin, shining silver dagger from inside his cloak. His voice broke into petrified sobs.

"Flesh - of the servant… w-willingly - given you will - revive - your master…"

He stretched his right hand out in front of him- the hand with the missing finger. He gripped the dagger very tightly in his left hand and swung it upward. Harry realised what Wormtail was about to do a second before it happened - he closed his eyes as tightly as he could, but he could not block the scream that pierced the night, that went through Harry as though he had been stabbed with the dagger, too. He heard something fall to the ground, heard Wormtail's anguished panting, then a sickening splash, as something was dropped into the cauldron. Harry couldn't stand to look, but he nevertheless opened his eyes… the potion had turned a burning red.

Wormtail was gasping and moaning with agony. He fumbled around his cloak with his remaining hand, still panting with pain, and pulled out a glass vial full of blood-red liquid.

"B-blood of the enemy… forcibly taken… you will… resurrect your foe."

He poured the contents of the vial inside the cauldron. The liquid within turned, instantly, a blinding white. Wormtail dropped to his knees beside the cauldron, then slumped sideways and lay on the ground, cradling the bleeding stump of his arm, gasping and sobbing.

The cauldron was simmering, sending its diamond sparks in all

directions, so blindingly bright that it turned all else to velvety blackness.

Nothing happened for a long time… Harry prayed nothing would happen… that it had gone wrong…

But then, suddenly, the sparks emanating from the cauldron were extinguished. A surge of white steam billowed thickly from the cauldron instead, obliterating everything in front of Harry, so that he couldn't see Wormtail or anything but vapour hanging in the air. Then through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron.

"Robe me," said the high, cold voice from behind the steam, and Wormtail, sobbing and moaning, still cradling his mutilated arm, scrambled to pick up the black robes from the ground, got to his feet, reached up, and pulled them one-handed over his master's head.

The thin man stepped out of the cauldron. His face belonged to someone who had haunted Harry's nightmares for three years… whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils…

It was Lord Voldemort.

…

Harry woke up immediately after. For a long time he didn't move as he panted frantically whilst lying on the cold floor of his dormitory. It was still dark outside and all of his dormitory fellows were still snoring in their four-poster beds except Ron, who was mumbling something about spiders in his sleep.

Eventually, Harry remembered protocol. He first collected his memory of the dream and sent a text to Sherlock and John. Then, after stuffing his MMN phone and memory harvesting charm in his pocket and sealing the pocket shut, he shook Ron awake.

"Ron," Harry whispered. "Ron!"

Ron swatted at him. "g'way…"

"I just had another dream of Voldemort," said Harry, directly in his ear.

Ron turned over and buried his face in his pillow for a second. Then he abruptly threw his covers off and sat upright with his eyes wide open.

"WHAT?! You-"

Harry quickly covered Ron's mouth before he could wake everyone up with his shouting.

"Listen," said Harry in rush. "Sherlock gave me instructions on what I should do if I have this kind of dream. I have to go the Hospital Wing and you need to tell everyone where I am at. Just make it sound like I'm down with something horrible."

"… Like *what* ?" asked Ron, incredulous.

"Pneumonia, lupus or the bubonic plague-it doesn't matter," said Harry. "Just hint that it looks really awful. Don't worry about the details, Miss Jackie will fill you in."

And with that, Harry left the dormitory. On his way to the portrait hole, Harry cancelled the spell Dumbledore placed on him a week ago to hide the fact his hair had turned grey after he gave his blood to Remus to cure his lycanthropy. Then Harry took out a small blue pill from the lining of his jacket and swallowed it.

Madam Pomfrey wasn't at all pleased when she found Harry knocking on the Hospital Wing's door at the crack of dawn.

"Who did this!" she raged, holding Harry's head between her hands. "What happened to you?"

"I don't know," said Harry, trying to sound desperate. "Can you fix it?"

"I shall certainly try," said Madam Pomfrey grimly, pulling Harry inside. "This might take a while…"

But whatever remedy Madam Pomfrey had in mind, she didn't get to use it on Harry, as he blacked out after a few steps. Harry had a vague memory of feeling extremely hot and weightless afterwards, and hearing unfamiliar voices saying that he was burning his sheets.

When Harry woke up again, he was lying on a bed that definitely didn't belong to the Hogwarts' hospital wing. Madam Pomfrey was sitting on a chair to his left. An elderly, long haired but clean-shaven wizard wearing lime-green robes, which had the emblem of a wand and bone, crossed, embroidered on the chest, stood next to her. Both looked immensely relieved when Harry stared at them quizzically.

"Looks like the fairy ointment did the trick," said the wizard, scribbling something on the clipboard he was holding.

"What happened?" Harry asked, genuinely puzzled.

"We're not entirely sure, Mr. Potter," said the wizard. "We certainly couldn't decide if you had to go to the Dai Llewellyn Ward or Spell Damage when you kept turning into a fiery salamander, a firebird, and a burning coal and then back again… Luckily, visiting healer Robert Ju was able to identify the ailment and administer the remedy."

"I… *what* ?" Harry stammered. "What did I have?"

"The Tamlane Curse," said the wizard, shaking his head, "It's a rather obscure jinx… almost completely forgotten in this day and age. Speaking of which, Mr. Potter, do you remember anyone casting a Scottish-Gaelic spell on you?"

Harry answered no (not that he knew what a Scottish-Gaelic spell would sound like). The wizard-who eventually introduced himself as Hippocrates Smethwyck-asked several additional questions, but when Harry failed to confirm any of his suspicious, he shook his head in disappointment and made movements to leave.

"Do I have to stay here?" Harry asked.

"Well…" said Smethwyck hesitantly. "You're certainly not turning into

a fiery animal…"

"That means I can go, right?" said Harry quickly.

Smethwyck grimaced. "I would rather you stay a bit longer for observation… your white hair worries me, but Healer Ju assured me it's probably due to the blood tests you went through as a child… oh, alright."

Madam Pomfrey and Healer Smethwyck talked while Harry prepared to leave. He asked them if his Muggle parents knew what had happened to him, and Madam Pomfrey said yes.

"I better call them, then," said Harry fishing around his pockets.

Then he stopped.

"Hey, my phone's gone."

"Really?" said Madam Pomfrey, frowning. "That's odd… I just used it an hour ago to contact Dr. Watson."

"Did you put it back into my jacket?" said Harry as he made a huge show of turning out all his pockets.

"Yes," said Madam Pomfrey, now helping Harry search for his phone. "Isn't this strange…"

The phone didn't turn up, even though several ward wizards and witches looked for it. In the end Madam Pomfrey took Harry to the Welcome Witch on the first floor to file a missing item report.

"I can't afford to lose it," said Harry urgently. "I use it to do stuff for the Magical Mobile Network."

"We'll send you an Owl if we ever find it," said the blond witch irritably. "Personally, I doubt it'll turn up. Next!"

"… So you lost your phone at St. Mungos?" said George in a hushed voice when Harry finished talking.

"Uh-huh," said Harry. "I hope no one did something funny with it…"

George and Fred looked at each other.

"What?" said Harry, frowning, "Did something happen?"

Fred wet his lips. "Eh, sort of."

Harry deepened his frown. "Spit it out."

"Don't panic," said George reassuringly. "I'm sure it'll turn out okay. It's just… well, at the end of the second task, a really, creepy footage showed up on the screen…"

Final Notes : I hope this answers any questions concerning how LV's rebirth was broadcasted over the MMN. I had to rewrite the chapter three times before I got it okay. Sigh. The structure is a bit awkward, so I hope it didn't cause too much confusion.

After OOTP, I'm thinking to create a separate story for the remaining years of ASIM. Partly because ASIM is getting hideously long (the projected end of OOTP is chapter 82; the more realistic number is 90… eek!), but also, after OOTP, Harry, John and Sherlock will focus on applying magic, rather than study it. The provisional title of this hypothetical fic is: "A Magical Application" #BOCneedstostopnamingthingslikeanengineer

The Ministry Maneuvers

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy One: The Ministry Maneuvers

Lestrade felt a sense of inevitability and impending doom when he received a summons from Cornelius Fudge the day after the LV War Prep Meeting. He took the Ministry of Magic's lift to go down to the first floor, grumbling all the way, and braced himself for a long and harrowing interrogation session as he knocked on the door to the Minister of Magic's office.

"Yes?" said Fudge's voice immediately.

"It's Lestrade. You wanted to see me?"

"Ah, yes," said Fudge. "Yes, do come in, Lestrange."

Lestrade reminded himself that shoving the MM's wand down his throat for using his much despised family name was bad form as he entered. He found Fudge seated behind a vast mahogany desk, looking offensively paternal with his fat hands clasped together.

"Take a seat," said Fudge as he unclasped a hand to wave at the chair before his desk. "You must be tired, going back and forth from here to your Muggle post. Here, have a drink."

Lestrade regarded the tumbler of Scotch Fudge pushed towards his direction for a lingering moment.

"Sorry, but I have a yeast allergy," Lestrade lied. "I break out in hives when I drink the stuff."

"Oh," said Fudge, looking putout, "Too bad."

"Thanks for offering, anyway," said Lestrade as he sat down. "So what did you want to see me for?"

Fudge suddenly turned serious.

"That ugly prank footage that appeared at the Triwizard Tournament yesterday, what else?" he said. "The *Prophet* is having a field day over it… and the Ministers of Magic from France and Bulgaria have been pelting me with owls ever since! I need to get to the bottom of this mess, get it resolved and out of the way as quickly as possible!"

"You want *me* to investigate?" said Lestrade, eyebrows raised. "But I have a conflict of interest. Jacqueline's my sister-in-law."

"You're the only person who can understand how the Magical Mobile Network works and who our kind would respect," said Fudge flatly. "Normally a case like this would go to Arthur Weasley, but considering his reputation and past affiliations, I can't afford to let him handle it."

Lestrade certainly couldn't see Arthur resisting the urge to permanently damage Jacqueline's servers out of innocent curiosity. "Okay, so you want to find out how and why. But sounds like you've already made up your mind that it's a *prank* ."

"I'm not ruling out other possibilities, but prank is the best explanation we have right now," said Fudge tersely.

"Dumbledore told Hogwarts the footage was *real* ."

"Just because Dumbledore says so doesn't mean that it's true!" snapped Fudge. "I mean: You-Know-Who *back* ? Preposterous. Absolutely preposterous. What was the point of the Boy-Who-Lived, then, I ask you!"

Lestrade wondered how Harry would take this statement.

"I suppose there is some room for doubt," Lestrade conceded. "But considering *who* might be back, wouldn't it be wiser to take some precautions? At least find out where this footage was filmed at?"

"That may be true, but that doesn't mean we should lead the country to panic," said Fudge sternly. "That's exactly what Dumbledore is trying to do. You wouldn't believe the sort of advice he gave me. He actually thinks we should remove the Azkaban guards! As if anyone in their right mind would! Half of the Wizarding World sleeps soundly at night because the Dementors are guarding the prisoners. Doesn't he realise a move like that will destabilize everything we've accomplished so far? Mind is starting to go, if you ask me."

"He looked fine to me," said Lestrade, before he could stop himself. "Blimey, if I'm as sharp as he is when I'm a hundred…"

"Don't tell me you're for Dumbledore, too!" Fudge exclaimed.

"I'm just *saying*," said Lestrade, with an exaggerated shrug. "I mean, how would I know? I've only met him three times my entire life."

"Oh," said Fudge, looking a bit taken aback. "Well, no, I don't suppose you would… I keep forgetting you never went to Hogwarts."

Then a sly smile started to play on Fudge's lips.

"It was horrible, wasn't it, learning you were never admitted to Hogwarts, even though you had every right to," said Fudge, donning a face that would have been quite appropriate at a funeral.

"One of the biggest regrets of my life, yeah," Lestrade said, truthfully enough.

"I definitely consider it a tragedy," said Fudge pompously. "You're a fine wizard, if I may say so. You have no idea how invaluable you have been to the Ministry. Especially considering the current Muggle climate… Muggles these days," Fudge suddenly grumbled. "They just won't let us *be* like they used to!"

Lestrade said nothing in response, though he had a lot to say (none

of them remotely polite).

"It should've never happened," Fudge went on. " *I* would've never let that happen. You know, I think it is high-time Hogwarts went through some much-needed change."

"What do you mean?" Lestrade asked.

"I always gave Dumbledore free-reign over Hogwarts," said Fudge. "Complete free-reign. That worked well enough in the past, but now, in light of what happened recently and you, I think it's time the Ministry took a more active role in Hogwarts and take a close look at Dumbledore. His decisions are turning increasingly questionable and I'm even starting to doubt his sanity. Lucius has been hinting at this for years, but I didn't see the signs myself until now…"

"Hang on, Lucius Malfoy got sacked as school governor two years ago for questionable conduct," Lestrade interrupted. "You sure you want to listen to him?"

Fudge turned a bit red.

"Good advice is still good advice, no matter what the source," he said evasively. "But as I was saying, I think the Ministry should step up and make sure Hogwarts is running properly. I'm thinking of ratifying a new educational decree and appoint an Inquisitor to Hogwarts. I know just the person… she's quite good at evaluating chaff and getting rid of nonsense… Who knows, she might find evidence Dumbledore had a hand in the footage!"

This time Lestrade blinked as he digested Fudge's words and its implications. Did Fudge really mean…?

"Hang on, Minister," said Lestrade. "Are you… you think *Dumbledore* set the whole thing up?"

"I cannot afford to overlook the possibility," said Fudge importantly. "The idea is not as mad as you think. It's certainly saner than sending envoys to giants for a nonexistent You-Know-Who threat, which is another thing Dumbledore suggested. Envoys to giants… *Ha* ! They'd kick me out of the office for even suggesting it! I can't

put anything past him at this point…"

Lestrade certainly wouldn't put past anything less absurd and irrational from the Minister.

"Anyway, we need to move quickly, before Dumbledore can do any real damage," said Fudge. "So first things, first: do you think Harry Potter agrees with Dumbledore?"

Lestrade hadn't expected this question, but at the same time, it wasn't exactly surprising. Gaining the endorsement of the person famous for defeating LV when his opponent was announcing LV's return would be a good political move under different circumstances.

"I have no idea," Lestrade answered. "I don't really talk to him, and he's at the age when it's not cool to talk to authority figures like me, unless it's to talk back."

"His adoptive parents, then? You're friends with them, aren't you?"

Lestrade was very tempted to tell Fudge Sherlock Holmes could count the number of his friends with two mutilated hands, and he wasn't one of them.

"I work with Sherlock Holmes often enough," Lestrade replied.

Fudge nodded in satisfaction. "Do you think Mr. Holmes agrees with Dumbledore?"

"I'm not sure, but Sherlock and Dumbledore rarely see eye-to-eye," said Lestrade honestly. "Sherlock's too scientific and Dumbledore is, well, too Magic, I guess."

"Excellent. What about Mrs. Holmes?"

It took several seconds for Lestrade to realise the 'Mrs. Holmes' Fudge was talking about was John Watson.

"Joh… uh, *Jay* generally agrees with Dumbledore, as long as Sherlock admits he has a point," said Lestrade, wording his answer carefully. "But that was before. I don't think she knows what's been going on lately. Had a baby last year; you know how much time they

take up."

"Ah, yes," said Fudge. "Yes, that's right… I've forgotten… but are Potter and Mrs. Holmes close?"

"Yeah, sure. You'd think she gave birth to him, they're so natural."

"Perfect," said Fudge triumphantly. "Mrs. Holmes is a sensible woman. It shouldn't be too difficult to make her see reason. Once she's convinced, getting Potter's support should be a cinch. Dumbledore won't have a leg to stand on."

Lestrade was of the opinion John and Harry would no more agree to this male cattle excrement than Sherlock would.

"It's going to be tough, making changes while there are foreign guests," Lestrade remarked. "Well, you do what you think you ought to do. Anything else you want to tell me?"

"No, that will be all. I expect a report from you soon, Lestrange."

Lestrade left, but not before giving Fudge a jaunty, two fingered salute.

Lestrade boarded the lift that could take him to the second floor. He headed straight to the Auror's Headquarters once the lift stopped and opened its doors. Scarlet-robed witches and wizards were flitting about or poring over reading materials in their cubicles inside the office. Lestrade spotted two wizards talking quietly to each other across the room, at the other side. One was a tall, black and bald wizard and the other an almost equally tall, thin and balding wizard, who still possessed some of his original bright red hair.

"There you are, Kingsley," said Lestrade, walking briskly towards the duo. "I've been looking for you-do you have any updates on the drug-runners case?"

"I'm still waiting for Weasley to respond to my question on his firelegs report," said Kingsley Shacklebolt. "I'm following up with him right now."

"If you had read my report you would know that the term is firearms,"

said Arthur coolly. Then he leaned closer and whispered, "If you can get away before seven, Molly's making meatballs."

"Great, I'll bring Ellen," said Lestrade quietly. Then in a louder voice, he said, "In other words, no. Can you lot hurry up please? Your delays are stalling *my* investigation."

The three men met again later in the evening, in Arthur and Molly's kitchen.

"So what did Fudge want?" Kingsley asked as they sat around the wooden table.

"He's putting me in charge of the film investigation," Lestrade answered. "He also hinted that he's sending someone to Hogwarts as an Inquisitor… he's expecting her to find evidence that Dumbledore was behind it all."

"He can't do that!" exclaimed Arthur, looking outraged. "Dumbledore didn't know Sherlock was plotting to broadcast it! He might have *guessed*, but he had no hand in it at all!"

"But that would mean this Inquisitor won't find any evidence against Dumbledore, since there isn't any to find," Kingsley pointed out.

"I have a feeling this Inquisitor person isn't above planting evidence," muttered Lestrade darkly. "Well, I'm the lead investigator, so I'll do what I can. We'll see how Fudge takes it when I don't give him the evidence he wants."

Kingsley grinned. "He'll take it. You're too posh for him not to."

"I am not posh. I don't *want* to be posh," Lestrade crabbed. "Just so you know: One of these days, I'm really going to shove a wand down the throat of the next person who calls me The Stranger. So intervene accordingly."

Arthur and Kingsley laughed. Lestrade joined them after telling everyone in the kitchen Fudge's (deeply misguided, doomed to failure) plan to convince Sherlock and John to join his cause against Dumbledore.

"Fudge meeting *Sherlock*," said Arthur, wide-eyed. "I almost feel sorry for Fudge."

"He actually met the Baker Street prats before," said Lestrade. "But they were playing roles. Sherlock needed to get some info out of Fudge for the Sirius Black case. It was the most awesome but creepy thing I've ever seen."

"I'd like to meet them," said Kingsley.

"Don't kill me afterwards," said Lestrade, only half-joking.

"If not Sherlock Holmes, I definitely want to meet Dr. Watson," said Kingsley. " *She's* the one on our unofficial blacklist of Muggles."

"You have a *blacklist* ?"

"More like a list of repeat offenders," said Kingsley, smiling wryly. "Dr. Watson is on the top by a huge margin: sixteen obliviated Obliviators, Greg, *sixteen* ! And no case of successful memory modification to boot."

Greg whistled. "Why did the guys try so hard for so long?"

"Wounded pride, mostly," said Kingsley. "No one wanted to believe a Muggle could trounce a wizard, let alone a small squad of them. But of course, she kept on trouncing them, so things only got worse…"

In the days following his return from St. Mungo's, Harry and his friends worked hard to convince as many people as they could that the LV rebirth broadcast was a record of a real event. They got a leg up when they discovered Igor Karkaroff, headmaster of Durmstrang, had fled Hogwarts overnight.

"He was a convicted Death Eater," Hermione was quick to inform the crowd gathered around Harry to ask him about Karkaroff. "But he made a bargain with the Ministry. They decided to let him go if he could tell them the identities of all the Death Eaters that were known to him. His testimony let the Aurors discover a mole within the

Ministry of Magic itself! So if there's anyone who's afraid of You-Know-Who's return, it's him!"

Rumours went wild after this bit of information got out. The consensus was Karkaroff thought the footage was genuine and fled, since Lord Voldemort would go after him for betraying so many of his followers. Harry, as Sherlock had instructed, cautioned anyone who asked him about Karkaroff that just because *Karkaroff* thought the film was genuine, didn't necessarily mean the film really was a record of LV's return.

"I do think the possibility of it being real is high, though," he would add. "It takes a lot of money and effort to create a film that real-looking. I'm talking about hundreds of thousands of Galleons here. Who has that kind of money to spend? We can't rule out the possibility Karkaroff had other sources of information that let him know Vol- eh, You-Know-Who is really back, either. I mean, LV would summon all his followers to him, won't he, if he's back? Maybe that's how Karkaroff knew the film was real: he heard the summons."

There were, of course, plenty of detractors. Quite a lot of students bought the Ministry of Magic's stance that Miss Jackie was a prime suspect since she had the necessary access and ability to create and broadcast such a film. Harry's argument that very few people had the money to create a fake footage ended up backfiring on him, as he couldn't deny Miss Jackie had more than enough money to fund such an endeavor.

Luckily, Harry had Hermione Granger on his side.

"What about the motive?" Hermione argued when Seamus mentioned the Miss Jackie the culprit theory over Breakfast. "What good would it do to Miss Jackie if she pulled such a prank? Moreover, can you actually see her pulling a *prank* ? A prank that-that *tasteless* ?"

"She doesn't have much capacity for fun and games," George Weasley agreed. "And personally, I have trouble imaging her harming a *fly*…"

Still, many people held on to the belief Miss Jackie could've done it. One seventh year actually argued the reason why Harry wasn't considering Ms. Shin as a suspect was because she paid him well.

"Are you saying I want You-Know-Who back?" said Harry furiously when he heard this.

"I never said that," the seventh year said defensively at first, but then more boldly, "But I suppose *you* wouldn't worry about it even if he did. You probably think you can handle him again, since you got rid of him as a baby."

"Why would I want the man who killed my parents *back* ?" growled Harry, as he felt himself raising his hackles. "You probably don't know since you've never lost your mother, but it's very comforting to know your mother's murderer got himself killed for what he did to her."

"How do you know I'm not an orphan? You're just assuming that I'm not!"

" *Please*," Harry sneered, shocking his own self at how much he sounded like Sherlock as he did so. "Your quills are new. You couldn't have bought them at Hogsmeade, we haven't been allowed there recently. You can't mail-order quills and if you bought them from someone else, you wouldn't have bought a whole bundle. Someone bought it for you and Owled it, then. It's your mother since the parcel that held the quills has ' *Love, Mum* ' written on it."

The seventh year looked abashed as he turned red.

"Look, I don't want him back!" Harry shouted, before the seventh year could say anything. "But just because I don't want him back, doesn't mean I can assume he isn't! Reality won't adjust to my wants! And in case you haven't thought of this already: if it turns out LV really is back and we do nothing to prepare for this, we've got everything to lose because that'll only help him!"

Opinions remained sharply divided for the rest of the week. Harry and his friends tried to think of new ways that would shift the tide, but couldn't think of a line of argument that they haven't used

already. Often times Harry felt like he was talking to a wall as people kept trying to argue against him, bringing up reasons he thought he'd already dismantled.

Then Monday morning came. Hermione received her copy of the *Daily Prophet*, which she had started to read very carefully and thoroughly. Harry and Ron didn't know why she bothered. The *Prophet* only told the Ministry of Magic's side of the news and ridiculed all its detractors.

"Harry," Hermione said suddenly. "Harry, you've got to read this."

"What is it?" said Harry quickly. "Did the Ministry change their mind?"

"No," said Hermione grimly. "Here, see for yourself."

Harry read the article Hermione shoved into his face.

New Hogwarts High Inquisitor

The Ministry of Magic has appointed Undersecretary Dolores Jane Umbridge as High Inquisitor to Hogwarts, in accordance with the newly ratified Educational Decree Number Twenty-two. The appointment came swiftly after Hogwarts' current Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, was ousted as Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards after several members of the committee raised questions over his leadership. Ms. Umbridge's primary task is ensuring Hogwarts has satisfactory teaching staff and apparatus.

"I feel much easier in my mind now that I know that Dumbledore is being subjected to fair and objective evaluation," said Mr. Lucius Malfoy from Wiltshire. "Many of us with our children's best interests at heart have been concerned about some of Dumbledore's eccentric decisions in the last few years and will be glad to know that the Ministry is keeping an eye on the situation."

"High Inquisitor?" said Harry blankly. "What is that?"

"It's a new position," said Hermione. "Fudge obviously created it so he can have someone loyal to him inside Hogwarts and give him an excuse to sack someone."

"… Like Dumbledore?"

"Yes."

Harry bit his lip. "What about Educational Decree Number twenty-two?"

"It's a new law. The Ministry passed it yesterday at around midnight," said Hermione.

Harry, Ron and Neville stared. "But yesterday was a *Sunday* ! The Ministry doesn't hold sessions on weekends!" Ron protested.

"Of course they do," said Hermione exasperatedly. "Law makers do it all the time when they want to pass an unpopular law. It's easier since not everyone will show up. In this case, it looks like hardly anyone was notified Fudge was holding session. It says here Griselda Marchbanks and Tiberius Ogden, both active members of the Wizengamot, left their posts at the Ministry in protest against the Decree."

Harry had nothing to say after Hermione finished speaking. While he sat wordlessly, Ginny joined them at the Gryffindor table.

"Morning," said Ginny. "Hey, who is *that* ?"

Harry looked at where she was pointing. His eyes first lit upon Professor Dumbledore, sitting in his high-backed golden chair at the centre of the long staff table, wearing deep-purple robes scattered with silvery stars and a matching hat. Dumbledore's head was inclined towards the woman sitting next to him, who was talking into his ear. She looked, Harry thought, like somebody's maiden aunt: squat, with short, curly, mouse-brown hair in which she had placed a horrible pink Alice band that matched the fluffy pink cardigan she wore over her robes. Then she turned her face slightly to take a sip from her goblet and he saw a pallid, toad like face, a very wide,

slack mouth and a pair of prominent, pouchy eyes.

"That must be Umbridge!" said Hermione.

"Who?" said Ginny.

"She's the new High Inquisitor of Hogwarts," said Hermione. "Minister Fudge appointed her last night."

"Nice cardigan," said Ron, smirking.

"Wonder what kind of person she is," said Neville thoughtfully.

Dumbledore introduced the witch eventually.

"We have a visitor today. Please join me and welcome Madam Dolores Umbridge, the new High Inquisitor of Hogwarts!"

There was a round of polite but fairly unenthusiastic applause.

"Madam Umbridge is here to observe Hogwarts," Dumbledore continued. "So do not be alarmed if you see her in your classes-"

He broke off, looking enquiringly at Umbridge. As she was not much taller standing than sitting, there was a moment when nobody understood why Dumbledore had stopped talking, but then Umbridge cleared her throat, " *hem, hem*," and it became clear that she had got to her feet and was intending to make a speech.

Dumbledore only looked taken aback for a moment. Then he sat down smartly and looked alertly at Umbridge as though he desired nothing better than to listen to her talk. Other members of staff were not as adept at hiding their surprise. Professor Sprout's eyebrows had disappeared into her flyaway hair and Professor McGonagall's mouth was as thin as Harry had ever seen it. No one had ever interrupted Dumbledore before. Many of the students were smirking; this woman obviously did not know how things were done at Hogwarts.

"Thank you, Headmaster," Umbridge simpered, "for those kind words of welcome."

Her voice was high-pitched, breathy and little-girlish. It took Harry aback, as he was expecting her to croak. Also something about her voice and fluffy pink cardigan deeply grated him. While Harry tried to place his dislike, Umbridge gave another little throat-clearing cough ("hem, hem") and continued.

"Well, it is lovely to be back at Hogwarts, I must say!" She smiled, revealing very pointed teeth. "And to see such happy little faces looking up at me!"

Harry glanced around. None of the faces he could see looked happy. On the contrary, they all looked rather taken-aback at being addressed as though they were five-years-old.

"I am very much looking forward to getting to know as many of you as possible. I'm sure we will be good friends!"

Students exchanged looks at this; some of them were barely concealing grins.

"I'll be her friend as long as I don't have to borrow that cardigan," Parvati whispered to Lavender, and both of them lapsed into silent giggles.

Madam Umbridge cleared her throat again ("hem, hem"), but when she continued, some of the breathiness had vanished from her voice. She sounded much more businesslike and now her words had a dull learned-by-heart sound to them.

"The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches and wizards to be of vital importance. The rare gifts with which you were born may come to nothing if not nurtured and honed by careful instruction. The ancient skills unique to the wizarding community must be passed down the generations lest we lose them forever. The treasure trove of magical knowledge amassed by our ancestors must be guarded, replenished and polished by those who have been called to the noble profession of teaching."

Madam Umbridge paused here and made a little bow to her fellow staff members, none of whom bowed back to her. Professor

McGonagall's dark eyebrows had contracted so that she looked positively hawk-like, and Harry distinctly saw her exchange a significant glance with Professor Sprout as Umbridge gave another little " *hem, hem* " and went on with her speech.

"Every headmaster and headmistress of Hogwarts has brought something new to the weighty task of governing this historic school, and that is as it should be, for without progress there will be stagnation and decay. There again, progress for progress's sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering. A balance, then, between old and new, between permanence and change, between tradition and innovation…"

Harry found his attentiveness ebbing, as though his brain was slipping in and out of tune, even though he knew he was supposed to pay attention to what Umbridge was blathering about. The quiet that always filled the Hall when Dumbledore was speaking was breaking up as students put their heads together, whispering and giggling. Over on the Ravenclaw table a group of fifth year girls were chatting animatedly. Meanwhile, at the Hufflepuff table Ernie Macmillan was one of the few still staring at Madam Umbridge, but he was glassy-eyed and Harry was sure he was only pretending to listen. Madam Umbridge did not seem to notice the restlessness of her audience. Harry had the impression that a full-scale riot could have broken out under her nose and she would have ploughed on with her speech. The teachers, however, were still listening very attentively, and Hermione seemed to be drinking in every word Umbridge spoke, though, judging by her expression, they were not at all to her taste.

"… because some changes will be for the better, while others will come, in the fullness of time, to be recognized as errors of judgment. Meanwhile, some old habits will be retained, and rightly so, whereas others, outmoded and outworn, must be abandoned. Let us move forward, then, into a new era of openness, effectiveness and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited. I promise to help you all to get there."

She sat down. Dumbledore clapped. The staff followed his lead,

though Harry noticed that several of them brought their hands together only once or twice before stopping. A few students joined in, but most had been taken unawares by the end of the speech, not having listened to more than a few words of it, and Dumbledore stood up again before they could properly applaud.

"Thank you very much, Madam Umbridge, that was most illuminating," he said, bowing to her.

"Yes, it certainly was illuminating," said Hermione in a low voice.

"You're not telling me you enjoyed it?" Ron said quietly, turning a glazed face towards Hermione. "That was about the dullest speech I've ever heard, and I grew up with Percy."

"I said illuminating, not enjoyable," said Hermione. "It explained a lot."

"Like what?" said Ron blankly.

"She said 'progress for progress's sake must be discouraged' and 'pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited'."

"And?" said Ron impatiently.

"This means," said Hermione through gritted teeth, "The Ministry intends to interfere at Hogwarts."

The disquiet her statement generated followed them all the way out of the Great Hall.

Harry didn't see Umbridge afterwards until Thursday afternoon, at Defence Against the Dark Arts. He and his classmates had just finished cheering Professor Lupin's return to work, when they all heard the familiar 'hem, hem' at the door.

"Oh, why *now* ?" Ron grumbled.

"Hello, Professor… Lupin, is it?" said Umbridge, as she clutched a clipboard between her stubby hands, each finger wearing a number of ugly, old rings. "Did you get my note?"

"Certainly," said Remus politely. "Do come in."

"Thank you," said Umbridge girlishly. "Now before I start my observation, I would like to say a few words to your students, if you don't mind."

Harry wished Remus would say no. Remus spread a hand out, in a gesture of 'go-ahead', but he was expressionless and said nothing.

Umbridge stood behind the podium. She was so short they could only see her broad face above it. She was wearing a tiny black velvet bow in her hair this time. Harry was reminded forcibly of a large fly perched unwisely on top of an even larger toad.

"You might have heard that a certain Dark Wizard has returned. This is false," Umbridge announced in a sugary voice. "The footage that supposedly shows his return is a fake. So please do not listen to anyone who says otherwise, and please report to me if you encounter a person spreading such horrible lies."

"How do you know the film is a fake?" Harry asked.

There was a moment of silence while everyone stared at Harry, particularly Umbridge.

"The Ministry has people who can see right through that kind of horrible prank," said Umbridge. "Silly me, but for a teensy moment I thought you sounded doubtful, Mr. Potter! Surely you're not questioning the Ministry's judgment!"

"Actually I do," said Harry, drawing a gasp from Hermione. "The Ministry hasn't contacted Ms. Shin and she hasn't given them a report yet. So they can't know where the footage came from, or how it was transmitted and broadcasted over the Magical Mobile Network. How can *anyone* know whether the film is a fake or not if they don't know this?"

Umbridge went still for several seconds. Harry had a strong impression of being appraised by a malevolent toad.

"I never expected such impertinence," she said slowly. "Especially from you, Mr. Potter… Oh dear, I think I have no choice but to

punish you. A few detentions should do the trick."

"You can't do that!" said Neville, surprising almost everyone. "You're not a teacher!"

"I'm the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts," said Umbridge in a high-pitched voice. "I received authority from the Minister of Magic himself to do whatever it takes to ensure Hogwarts is running properly. That's why I cannot allow such blatant disregard for authority to continue. Mr. Potter, come to my office at five o' clock."

"She even has her own office!" Hermione hissed after Umbridge left, not bothering to stay and observe. "She's no visitor!"

They had the most subdued Defence Against the Dark Arts class since they had Lupin as a teacher. When the bell rang, Remus held Harry back.

"I know you mean well, Harry," said Remus seriously. "I also think you said things that needed to be said."

"But?" said Harry.

"The timing and the way you said it undermined the message," Remus chided. "You're supposed to present yourself as a reasonable figure, remember?"

"But Umbridge was being unreasonable first!" said Harry angrily. "She didn't even bother to answer any of my questions! She just wanted me to shut up!"

"I know," Remus sighed. "Listen, Harry: you shouldn't expect any kind of reasonableness from Umbridge. She's here to push the Ministry's-Fudge's-agenda and she clearly intends to use any means to achieve it. So don't lose your temper over her. It will only hurt you. As for her being unreasonable," he smiled a bit, "if anything, that bolsters our position, because you would look far more sensible in comparison."

Harry left the classroom feeling equal parts encouraged and rueful. Both emotions ebbed away as five o' clock drew nearer. Harry kept wondering what Umbridge would have him do as he dreaded it.

Harry went to Umbridge's office at five before five. The first thing he noticed when he entered was the décor: The surfaces had all been draped in lacy covers and cloths. There were several vases full of dried flowers, each one residing on its own doily, and on one of the walls was a collection of ornamental plates, each decorated with a large technicolour kitten wearing a different bow around its neck. These were so foul that Harry stared at them, transfixed, until Umbridge spoke to him. She told Harry his detention was to write lines using a black quill, her own, which had an unusually sharp point. The quill was laid across a sheet of parchment, which was placed on a small desk with a chair.

"I want you to write, *I must not listen to lies*," she told him softly.

"How many times?" Harry asked, with a creditable imitation of politeness.

"Oh, as long as it takes for the message to sink in," said Umbridge sweetly. "Off you go."

She moved over to her desk, sat down and bent over a stack of parchment. Harry raised the sharp black quill, and realised what was missing.

"You haven't given me any ink," he said.

"Oh, you won't need ink," said Madam Umbridge, with the merest suggestion of a laugh in her voice.

Harry placed the point of the quill on the paper and wrote: *I must not listen to lies* .

He let out a gasp of pain. The words had appeared on the parchment in what appeared to be shining red ink. At the same time, the words had appeared on the back of Harry's right hand, cut into his skin as though traced there by a scalpel-yet even as he stared at the shining cut, the skin healed over again, leaving the place where it had been slightly redder than before but quite smooth.

Harry looked round at Umbridge. She was watching him, her wide, toad-like mouth stretched in a smile.

"Yes?"

"Nothing," said Harry quietly.

He looked back at the parchment, placed the quill on it once more, wrote *I must not listen to lies*, and felt the searing pain on the back of his hand for a second time; once again, the words had been cut into his skin; once again, they healed over seconds later.

On and on it went. Harry did not ask when he would be allowed to stop. He did not even check his watch. He knew Umbridge was watching him for signs of weakness and he was not going to show any, not even if he had to sit there all night, cutting open his own hand with this quill…

"Come here," she said, after what seemed hours.

He stood up. His hand was stinging painfully. When he looked down at it he saw that the cut had healed, but that the skin there was red raw.

"Hand," she said.

He extended it. She took it in her own. Harry repressed a shudder as she touched him with her thick, stubby fingers.

"It hurts, doesn't it?" whispered Umbridge, clasping Harry's hand between both of hers. "You know, it can all stop if you just *listened*…"

Harry didn't reply, but glared at her fiercely.

"Well, if you didn't get the message this time, you might get it later," said Umbridge in that sickeningly sweet tone. "Tomorrow again at my office, Mr. Potter, the same time."

You won't last that long, Harry thought savagely as he stomped out of Umbridge's office.

Sherlock and John were at the sitting room table, watching a

holographic video clip showing a person writing with black quill. Each stroke of the quill produced a cut on the writer's hand, which healed within seconds. Sherlock's expression resembled a mask, but his knuckles were white as they gripped the table's edge. John's pale face openly showed fury beyond words.

There was a sound of footsteps. Soon Lestrade was standing at the doorway. He saw what Sherlock and John were watching and pursed his lips.

"In behalf of the world of wizarding bastards, I apologise," said Lestrade, looking down at the floor.

"Don't bother, you're not responsible for them," muttered John in a low, dangerous voice. "What's up?"

Lestrade held out a copy of the *Daily Prophet* in lieu of an answer. Sherlock got up and took it. His entire posture and expression turned rigid as he read the front page article:

The Ministry Opens Second Film Inquiry

Barely a week has passed and another disturbing film was found posted on the Magical Mobile Network's public bulletin board. The footage shows a Hogwarts student forced to use a Blood Quill during detention. The film's content generated outrage within the wizarding world, with many parents demanding an explanation. Minister Fudge told the Daily Prophet he has tasked High Inquisitor Umbridge to find the guilty teacher and promised harsh measures will be taken against the responsible party for harming a student…

"The… the sheer *nerve* of them," said John furiously as she read the paper over Sherlock's elbow. "Anyone who has *eyes* can tell Umbridge arranged the detention! Just look at the *hands* !"

"I know," growled Lestrade. "The whole situation is pile of bollocks, but worse still, Fudge is getting away with it."

Sherlock, who had been completely still and silent so far, let out a dreadful curse and threw the *Prophet* into the fire.

"I will stop them," he murmured as he watched the newspaper burn.

Final Notes : ASIM!OOTP is taking giant strides! Umbridge is here! Writing her was worse than writing Lockhart! ARGH! ETA: I apologize for the roughness of the initial posting. The chapter has been since cleaned up a bit.

A Most Valuable Institution

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Two: A Most Valuable Institution

It took an embarrassing amount of time for Harry to realise something had happened to the short memory-video of his detention with Umbridge, which he had posted on the Magical Mobile Network's bulletin board overnight per Hermione's furious insistence. In the following morning, he was too busy studying the Hogwarts students, most whom which were muttering imprecations against Umbridge over breakfast, which was exactly the reaction he and Hermione had hoped to generate. But then Ron pointed out Umbridge wasn't receiving any Howlers.

"There's no way she wouldn't get any," said Ron quietly so only they would hear. "If any of the parents are like my Mum, they would've sent one the moment they've seen the video."

So Harry turned his attention the head table. Many of his teachers were there, including Umbridge. She looked up from her plate at that same moment, and a wide callous smile spread across her flabby face, which both puzzled and infuriated Harry. It felt as though she holding an ace of trumps, though *how* Harry had no clue.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Neville continued to wonder what Umbridge was up to. Then Hermione pulled up Harry's video-post

during History of Magic to check the MMN user response. That was when they discovered someone had edited their film. All you could see was Harry's hand writing with a black quill, the back of his hand blurred so one couldn't read the words that were cut into the flesh, though the blurring didn't disguise the fact his hand was being cut. There was no sound, but at the end Umbridge's hands-unmistakable with its size, shape and many ugly rings-held Harry's red and raw hand aloft for the viewers to see.

"Who could've done this?" said Hermione, stunned. "Only the original poster can delete or edit a published video!"

"I have access to everything," Ron reminded her. "But I didn't do it," he added quickly.

"Of course you didn't!" Hermione hissed. " *No one* who has access would've done it! So the question is, how did-"

She stopped. Everyone stared at her as her expression turned increasingly horrified.

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"… What about Miss Jackie?" Hermione whispered.

"No way," said Harry, Ron and Neville together.

"I didn't mean she did voluntarily," said Hermione. "What if the Ministry forced her to do it? What if someone *enchanted* her to do it?"

"They wouldn't dare! Grandmaster Shin is going to make them wish he'd just killed them if they did!" Ron whispered furiously.

"I know," said Hermione worriedly. "But if the culprit thought the risk was worthwhile…"

Harry swallowed hard at the implications of this.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Neville intercepted Julia during lunch break. The five of them went to the Music Chamber to visit Miss Jackie, but found the doors locked. The sign posted on the wall next

to the entrance said:

Gone for private business; will return this evening

Jacqueline Shin

"Something's wrong," said Julia, as she turned pale. "Auntie Jack would never leave Hogwarts without telling me why."

"We need to talk to Sherlock, a.s.a.p.," said Harry.

"You do that, I need to talk to grandpa," said Julia before hurrying away.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Neville went straight to the Room of Requirement. Once it transformed to the secret conference room from before, they contacted Sherlock and told him what had happened.

"I was actually under the impression you edited the film exactly so to obscure your identity," Sherlock said when Harry finished speaking. "But this is interesting. Tell me about the original video."

"I posted the last two minutes of my detention," said Harry. "There was hardly any editing. The original footage didn't show my face, but it did show Umbridge's and you can hear everything she said."

"Would Umbridge be able to tell you were the one in detention from the original?"

"Mmm, actually I don't know," said Harry, as he thought about it. "I don't know if anyone else got detention, and the lines she made me write could've been customized."

Sherlock ran his fingers over his lips, looking pensive.

"Tell me what you think had happened," he said abruptly.

Harry wondered why Sherlock asked him this, even as he gathered his thoughts.

"Umbridge or someone from the Ministry probably spotted the post,"

said Harry. "I wouldn't be surprised if they're intercepting all the Owls coming to or leaving Hogwarts and scanning all the forums in the MMN to see how the wizarding world is reacting."

Sherlock nodded. "Yes, go on."

"Miss Jackie wouldn't have agreed to edit the post," Harry continued. "So the culprit must've forced her to do it, somehow. But it's strange the culprit wanted her to edit the video, not remove it. This means the culprit wanted to use the film."

"Yes, precisely," said Sherlock. "I suppose you were too busy observing your fellow students to see their reaction to your video-post to read the papers, but this morning's *Daily Prophet* said Inquisitor Umbridge was tasked to investigate all the Hogwarts teachers in order to find the culprit. Clearly her Ministry allies intend to criminally prosecute whomever they decided is their scapegoat."

Ron swore loudly.

"This is quite a cunning and ingenious move, all things considered," said Sherlock. "One I cannot credit Fudge or even Lucius Malfoy to come up with, but that's not important right now. Umbridge has the power to determine what constitute as evidence and who will be investigated. Knowing what we know, her goal will not be finding someone who best fits the bill, but incriminate the person whose removal will bring the Ministry the most benefit."

"You mean Dumbledore?" said Harry.

"Actually, no," said Sherlock. "Removing Dumbledore as Headmaster while the Triwizard Tournament is taking place will have ramifications on the international scale and not all of it is positive. It is far safer to do it *after* the Tournament ends, when the entire magical world is no longer scrutinizing the British Ministry of Magic so closely."

"Then who could it be?" said Neville, "One of the teachers?"

"Not the full-time teaching staff," said Sherlock. "The Ministry has *two* audiences they need to convince in order to pull this off. I've

already mentioned the Foreign Magical communities. What is the other?"

"The average witch and wizard in Magical Britain," said Hermione promptly. "The ministry will have a harder time convincing them since the students can see for themselves none of the teachers could've done it. They can also call their parents or post their opinions on the Magical Mobile Network, no matter what the *Prophet* says."

"Glad you mentioned the MMN," said Sherlock with a twisted smile. "The Magical Mobile Network, if you have not yet guessed it, is a thorn in the Ministry of Magic's side. As a private business, it is almost completely outside of their control. It is also a source of information the public trusts and relies on. Luckily for the Ministry, the owner of the company is part of the Hogwarts' teaching staff."

Harry felt like his heart had stopped.

"You… you mean they've picked Miss Jackie as their…?" he stammered.

"They can't!" wailed Hermione in anguish. "If they send her to Azkaban, she'll *die* !"

"It is more than possible the Ministry is banking on that," said Sherlock sombrely. "It's absurdly easy for them to do. They may put her in custody as a 'precaution', as they did Hagrid two years ago. Once Azkaban does its job, the Magical Mobile Network will fall into the Ministry of Magic's control."

There was a long moment where everyone was beyond words, they were so outraged. Then Harry noticed something off about the quality of Sherlock's grim face.

"But…?" he said.

"But?" Sherlock repeated.

"Well, you wouldn't be this calm if you didn't have a counter," Harry pointed out.

Sherlock chuckled appreciatively.

"The Ministry made two grave mistakes when they decided to take this course of action," he said. "What are they?"

"They made Mr. Shin their enemy," said Harry.

"Yes, how very foolish of them. And?"

Harry thought hard.

"Miss Jackie put in Umbridge's hands in the final cut. The culprit didn't see that part, or the video wouldn't have shown that."

"Therefore?"

"We can use this!" said Harry, as it all fell into place. "The culprit's hands are there for everyone to see! You can't take it down, it's too late, and the film itself is the Ministry's excuse to open an investigation!"

"Obviously," said Sherlock. "So how can we use this mistake?"

"The MMN televised news can interview Umbridge!" said Ron excitedly while Harry mentally fumbled around for the answer. "She's probably full of herself right now, thinking she'd foiled us! We'll make it look like we want to know what she's doing to catch the culprit at the interview, but what we're *really* doing is show everyone what her hands look like! We can then post anonymous comments that say her hands look exactly like the hands of the 'teacher' who shows up in the detention film to get the point across!"

"Oh Ron, that's absolutely brilliant!" said Hermione breathlessly.

"Definitely," said Harry, grinning like mad.

"I concur," said Sherlock, smirking. "The press is a most valuable institution if you only know how to use it. Now what are you waiting for?"

"Leave it to me," said Ron savagely. "Eat this, Umbridge… !"

Lestrade grimly headed to his first press conference as a Wizard in the Magic World. He found it very difficult to concentrate on his task at hand as Undersecretary Dolores Umbridge kept following after him, huffing and puffing.

"You can't think it was me!" Umbridge gibbered. "My record is above reproach… Minister Fudge would've told you this! And I am not the kind of person who wears so many rings!"

"Oh yeah?" said Lestrade, stopping because his temper finally got the better of him. "Then why do you have ring-shaped tan lines on all your fingers?"

Umbridge impulsively hid her right hand with her left after that remark. The gesture didn't really help because the fingers on her non-dominant hand had ring-shaped tan lines too. After drawing several short breaths, Umbridge pointed a stubby finger at Lestrade.

"You're working against Ministry regulation!" said Umbridge, her voice rising furiously. "As the Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, I rank higher than you! You should be following my lead!"

"I'm the head investigator of the LV rebirth footage scandal," growled Lestrade. "I report to Chief Auror Rufus Scrimgeour and the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones. There is no rule or regulation that says a member of the DMLE has to answer to the Minister of Magic's Undersecretary."

"But you're working for Minister Fudge!" Umbridge practically screamed.

"I'm working to find the *truth*," said Lestrade curtly. "Look, if you're really not the culprit, if you're telling me truth, then you've got nothing to fear."

"Is that a threat!?" shrieked Madam Umbridge. "Yes, you're threatening me, aren't you?! Fudge will hear this, make no mistake!"

"Go ahead," said Lestrade dismissively. "Tell him all you want. In fact, I'll tell him about your complaints myself, to save you trouble."

Umbridge looked taken aback.

"By the way, my father-in-law is absolutely furious at you for what happened to Jacqueline," said Lestrade casually. "He said if your job is to make sure Hogwarts is running properly, then why the hell was someone able to enchant Jack while she was under your watch?"

Umbridge turned purple, then a blotchy shade of oatmeal-porridge. Satisfied, Lestrade turned his back on her and resumed his trek.

The news conference room exploded with puffs of purple smoke and flashes of light when Lestrade finally arrived. Unlike in the normal world, there were only four press agencies present. The camera flashes and the news mongering expressions of the reporters, however, were exactly the same.

Lestrade tried not to scowl or slouch as he walked over to the head table. He sat down and waited for the reporters to take their own seats before he began the easier part of the press release:

"The Ministry has determined how the footage was broadcasted," Lestrade began. "After examining the Magical Mobile Network's phone logs, which record the date and type of usage, we have concluded the footage was sent through the Network while one of the camerapersons for the MMN was at St. Mungo's Hospital of Magical Maladies and Injuries. The cameraperson discovered their phone had gone missing after receiving treatment. This phone, incidentally, was one of the few phones that had the capacity to do this."

There was a lot of furious scribbling.

"So you think the culprit stole the cameraperson's phone to broadcast the footage?" asked the *Wizarding World Today's* reporter.

"That is the official stance," Lestrade confirmed.

"How do you know the cameraperson didn't broadcast the footage?" asked the *Daily Prophet* .

"The person had the Tamlane Curse," said Lestrade patiently. "The

healer in charge testifies it would've been impossible for this person to have been able to do anything while the footage was being broadcasted, as they were both unconscious and turning into a fiery snake, a firebird and a burning coal, then back over and over."

There was more furious scribbling.

"Has the phone been recovered?" *Wizarding World Today* 's reporter asked, after stabbing her quill on her notepad.

"No," said Lestrade. "But the phone has been disconnected from the Magical Mobile Network since it was reported missing, presumably stolen. Therefore there is no danger of other films being broadcasted through it."

"How can the Magical Mobile Network do this?" asked the *Daily Prophet* reporter.

"You should ask a Magical Mobile Network customer representative if you want a proper answer to that question," said Lestrade. "I was told the company used the same process through which they disconnect lost or missing phones of their customers-they deactivated the service line through their central information system, which also regulates the user privileges and phone usage."

"Can you tell us anything about the footage itself?" asked the *Wizarding World Today.*

"It is still under investigation," said Lestrade gravely. "The Ministry does not yet know who is responsible or how the footage was made. However…"

"Yes?" all the reporters said eagerly.

"Grandmaster Shin Jun Hu confirmed the spell and potion featured in the footage are real magic, capable of creating a body for a living, disembodied spirit," said Lestrade.

The human silence that met this declaration was total.

"This does not necessarily mean the footage is a record of a genuine event," said Lestrade. "There are two possible

explanations: either the footage is a record of an actual event or the culprit has taken the care to include this detail to make the footage look authentic. As I said before, the investigation into the film's origins and source are still on-going. The Ministry is doing everything we can to gather more information. Until then, I urge you to not speculate."

"What are your thoughts on the matter, Mr. Lestrand?" asked a very eccentric-looking reporter-certainly the oddest wizard Lestrade had ever seen; slightly cross-eyed, with shoulder-length white hair the texture of candyfloss, he wore a white cap whose tassel dangled in front of his nose and robes of an eye-watering shade of egg-yolk yellow. "What is your opinion?"

"I haven't formed one," said Lestrade while trying not to stare too obviously. "There is simply not enough evidence to make a final judgment."

"Are you investigating the second film scandal as well?" asked the *Daily Prophet.*

"I neither confirm nor deny," said Lestrade.

"Is it true the Ministry is hiding the fact High Inquisitor Umbridge is the one responsible for the detention?!" asked the wizard dressed like an omelet. "Surely you've read the comments on the televised interview of Madam Umbridge! All the users agree her hands look exactly like that of the so-called teacher in the detention video!"

Lestrade drew in a deep breath.

"I neither confirm nor deny," he said regretfully. "That will be all. Thank you."

Fudge called Lestrade to his office within an hour after the press conference.

"Why did you tell them the spell and potion was real magic?" said Fudge furiously. "It will only give Dumbledore more ammunition!"

Yes, exactly, Lestrade didn't say.

"The Dark Force League is planning to release a statement about the footage," said Lestrade calmly. "The statement draft said the spell and potion are both ancient Dark Magic. There's no point hiding something a third party is going to make public. It would only make us look stupid."

"Why wasn't I informed of this?!" Fudge exclaimed.

"I didn't know until the last minute," said Lestrade, trying not to smile. "Someone from Law Enforcement mentioned it to me in passing after my father-in-law told me about the spell, just before the conference started."

"I can't believe the horrible timing," Fudge grumbled. "If I'd have known, I could have convinced the Dark Force League to hold off the announcement."

"That would've been a bad move," Lestrade said. "They're an international group. You'll ruffle a lot of foreign feathers if you try to meddle in their affairs. Anyway, what's done is done. The public will think we know what we're doing. That's not bad, is it?"

Fudge mumbled something he didn't catch, looking thoroughly wrong-footed. Lestrade impishly reached out and patted his shoulder.

"Don't worry, the truth will come out," said Lestrade affably. "I won't leave any stone unturned until I find it."

"Seems like Umbridge is leaving Jack alone for now," John remarked as she replied to a text message.

"Wise choice," said Sherlock as he read the *Evening Prophet.*

"Umbridge cancelled Harry's detentions, too," said John.

"Good," said Sherlock, turning a page.

"You know, you told me only three weeks ago that you're planning to withdraw from the wizarding world," John remarked. "Since then

you've been meddling more and more-to the point you're actually trying to manipulate the entire wizarding world. What have I missed?"

"This is just preparation, John," said Sherlock smoothly. "Preparations for our future withdrawal; naturally it takes quite a bit of work to arrange."

"I suppose," said John, smiling. "So what is the next brilliant thing you have pending?"

Sherlock smirked broadly.

"The Ministry will come up with a counter," he said. "LV will make sure that they do. So before they can regroup, we strike."

"How?"

"Seemingly give them what they want," said Sherlock cryptically.

Final Notes : Again, trying to find the time to write this fanfic. The first draft of this chapter contained a section that was the ugliest and angriest thing I've ever written. It clashed badly with the rest of the chapter, so I scrapped it and reworked the rest.

An Unhappy Announcement

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Three: An Unhappy Announcement

As far as Severus could tell, Dolores Umbridge stopped trying to interact with the Hogwarts student body after she drew the collective ire of the Magic Mobile Network users. Unfortunately, this led Umbridge to turn her attention to the Hogwarts teachers, mainly in the form of classroom inspections.

Multiple classroom inspections

The teachers reacted differently to this. Flitwick, for example, was unfazed by Umbridge's presence and treated her like an unexpected guest. Student rumour mill had it McGonagall was quite spectacular to watch whenever Umbridge skulked in the corner of her classroom, quietly but furiously scribbling on her clipboard because McGonagall wouldn't let her speak during class. Most of the other teachers were left in a state of anxiety so acute Madam Pomfrey had to stock up on Calming Drafts and remedies for ulcers.

There was one caveat to these inspections: Umbridge never showed up in a class where Harry Potter was present.

Trelawney complained mightily about this. She taught Divinations, which Potter (wisely) elected not to take. It was difficult garner any

sympathy towards her, as Vector was in the same position and emerged from the inspections shaken, but mostly unscathed. Indeed, most of the teachers were inclined to worry over Kettleburn, who was put under probation (again).

"That Umbridge is trying to ruin my classes!" Kettleburn shouted furiously in the staffroom after Umbridge squated through his Care of Magical Creatures class.

"What did she do?" asked Sprout.

"Attack Hagrid, what else?!" roared Kettleburn as he made violent gestures. "You wouldn't believe what she wrote down on her notes! ' *Appears to have difficulty understanding basic English* '! ' *Students are deathly afraid of him but are not allowed to protest* '! ' *Ancestry deeply suspect considering his size and intelligence* '! The sheer nerve of that woman! How am I supposed to teach without Hagrid at my age!?"

Besides Kettleburn-who had amassed sixty-three periods of probation during his teaching career and thought Hagrid's taste for dangerous magical beasts was a boon to humanity-and Trelawney-whose Seer ability was always suspect, baring one exception-the teachers who bore the brunt of Umbridge's inspections were Lupin and Ms. Jacqueline Shin.

Umbridge was a nigh unto constant presence in Lupin's classes. When she wasn't hinting heavily Lupin's Defence Against the Dark Arts lessons were too biased towards violent solutions and should place more emphasis on compromise and negotiation-let the students die faster, in other words-she hounded Lupin over his frequent (monthly) absences. Lupin displayed a hitherto hidden sadistic streak by suggesting that they could have a long discussion on the subject in his office at such-and-such date, which also happened to be a night when there was a full moon.

Ms. Shin was likewise constantly grilled over the musical pieces she chose to teach the students. Unlike Lupin, she didn't have the gumption to inform Umbridge the 'Muggle ditty' she turned her nose up at was actually Johann Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg Concerto, No. 3. McGonagall and Flitwick took to lurking in the Music Room

during the evenings in attempt to shield Ms. Shin from the worst, but this did not stop Umbridge from remarking upon the pointless nature of the music lessons. After all, there was no magic involved in the endeavor.

"Are you suggesting History of Magic is pointless as well?" Flitwick exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, of course not, Professor Flitwick," Umbridge had said in sugary tone. "It's very important for students to learn about their magical forebears and how far the wizarding world progressed! Ms. Shin's music lessons, though, I can't help but question if there is any point to them when they don't even cover the great wizarding composers."

"Research from the Magical Institutes of Health has repeatedly demonstrated classical music and physical education greatly enhances a young wizard and witch's ability to learn magic-" Ms. Shin had started to explain.

"Excuse me, but I can't help but find that highly questionable," Umbridge interrupted. "The Ministry has not heard of any such research. At any rate, how could *you* possibly know whether these so-called studies are any good? You're not even a witch."

McGonagall didn't tell her colleagues what she said in retort, a great shame.

Severus himself was spared of repeat inspections. Umbridge showed up just once, and that was more than enough. Umbridge first remarked the material he taught was quite a bit advanced for the students, and had the temerity to suggest he ought to remove Strengthening Potions from the fifth year syllabus. Then she spewed a series of questions that put Severus in an increasingly murderous mood:

"Now… how long have you been teaching at Hogwarts?" she asked, her quill poised over her clipboard.

"Fourteen years," Severus replied.

"You applied first for the Defence Against the Dark Arts post, I

believe?" Umbridge asked.

"Yes," said Severus quietly, feeling deeply rankled at the reminder.

"But you were unsuccessful?"

Severus curled his lips.

" *Obviously.* "

Umbridge scribbled on her clipboard.

"And you have applied regularly for the Defence Against the Dark Arts post since you first joined the school, I believe?"

"Yes," said Severus quietly, barely moving his lips to conceal his anger.

"Do you have any idea why Dumbledore has consistently refused to appoint you?" asked Umbridge.

"I suggest you ask him," said Severus jerkily.

"Oh, I shall," said Umbridge with a hatefully sweet smile.

"I suppose this is relevant?" asked Severus, his eyes narrowed to the glare he'd perfected over the last decade and successfully used on numerous dimwitted students.

"Oh yes," said Umbridge, looking away, "yes, the Ministry wants a thorough understanding of teachers'- *er* -backgrounds."

Later that night, Severus typed up a text message:

Purely hypothetically how would Holmes commit the perfect murder?

Severus pondered the text for a long time. Then he deleted it. Severus told himself it would've been rash to actually send it to Watson.

Eventually the classroom visitations dwindled down as Umbridge submitted the results of her inspection. Kettleburn remained on probation and Trelawney was put on probation. The former merely

sniffed at it and the latter tried to find consolation in a bottle. Severus didn't know if Umbridge ever took up Lupin's invitation to have a talk over his monthly absences while viewing the full moon, but she clearly didn't detect his lycanthropy because he remained on staff. Ms. Jacqueline Shin also gave the impression she had received a clean bill in regards to Umbridge's inspection, disputes over the purpose for music lessons in a school of magic aside.

Then Ms. Shin announced she had submitted her letter of resignation.

" *Why* ?" everyone exclaimed.

"I'm getting married," Ms. Shin replied.

Flitwick and Sprout sputtered and gaped at the news. Indeed, all of the teachers present in the staffroom looked thoroughly shocked, including Severus, as they were unaware Ms. Shin did anything other than work (and necessary activities such as eating and sleeping that made her lifestyle minimally sustainable).

"… Well, congratulations," McGonagall stammered. "I'm very happy for you, Jacqueline."

Ms. Shin smiled. "Thank you."

"Who is your fiancé?" asked Sprout.

"His name is Robert Ransom," said Ms. Shin, "He's an American working as a Healer in Maryland."

"How did you meet him?" Sprout asked, looking amazed.

"Mmmm, well, he does pioneering research at the Magical Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland," mumbled Ms. Shin, looking down at her hands and blushing furiously. "Last year he published a scholarly article in *American Journal of Magical Medicine* on the relationship between the body's immune system and magic. Apparently those who have certain autoimmune diseases can become, in his words, type II squibs because the person's magic is busy correcting the abnormal immune response…"

Ms. Shin babbled at some length about her involvement in Ransom's search. Severus put a mental note to look up Healer Ransom, as his research gave a plausible explanation to Mr. Lestrade's mysterious loss and later recovery of magic ability. It also removed the necessity of Severus asking Miss Lestrade directly, a *very* good thing, as a male teacher asking a female student personal questions was at best awkward and at worst may result in the teacher's arrest.

"… So he was your healer, kind of," said Kettleburn, a glazed look in his eyes.

Ms. Shin nodded minutely, giving an impression she was deeply uncomfortable with the implied breach in healer-patient relations.

"Why did your upcoming nuptials make you think to resign?" asked McGonagall.

"We decided it is best I moved to the States," said Ms. Shin.

"How so?"

"Robert offered to transfer to St. Mungo's, but I didn't want him to interrupt his work," said Ms. Shin. "There are also better opportunities for me in the States."

"Such as?"

A wry smile touched Ms. Shin's lips. "America is more open to non-mainstream magic and their magic schools encourage physical education, art and music."

"What about the Magical Mobile Network?" squeaked Flitwick, "Will you move headquarters to America?"

"I'm actually thinking of selling it," said Ms. Shin.

All jaws dropped again, including Severus's. He had assumed Ms. Shin would fight to retain her ownership of the Magical Mobile Network as a means to disseminate accurate news to the Wizarding World, particularly in regards to the Dark Lord. Why would Dumbledore allow this to happen?

" *Why* ?" asked McGonagall, looking as dismayed as Severus felt.

"It's killing me," Ms. Shin whispered, looking bone-weary. "I mean this literally. Robert gave me an ultimatum: If I keep working at the rate I'm working right now, I'll *die* ."

Ah, Severus thought. It was no secret among the staff Ms. Shin worked insane hours to keep the MMN in good operating condition. Apparently Healer Ransom accomplished what the combined forces of Dumbledore, Grandmaster Shin, McGonagall and Pomfrey could not: convince Ms. Shin to stop lest she work herself to death. *The power of Love,* Severus thought sarcastically.

"Your health should certainly take a higher priority," said McGonagall, nodding.

"Robert said the same thing," said Ms. Shin. Then in a lighter tone, she said, "It's a relief, honestly. MMN was always a chore to work on."

Severus was going to remark selling the business would also free her from the Ministry's pressuring tactics, but Flitwick put a hex on him before he could open his mouth.

"Good riddance, then," said McGonagall firmly as Severus non-verbally removed the hex whilst glaring at Flitwick. "So when are you holding the ceremony?"

"I don't know," said Ms. Shin. "Probably in the next six months."

"That's a rather short engagement," Sprout remarked.

"We were actually shooting for three," said Ms. Shin, blushing. "I wanted to have a summer wedding, but we couldn't find a venue and…"

"Surely you could afford anything you so desire," said Severus snidely.

"Yes, that's true," said Ms. Shin patiently. "But most venues are fully booked four years in advance."

"Even in America?"

"Well, the recent government shut-down closed all the magical state parks and monuments, so all the brides who booked them are panicking and looking for alternatives…"

"What about Hogwarts? I'm sure Dumbledore would be delighted!"

Severus left his colleagues to interrogate Ms. Shin and headed over to the Headmaster's office. Dumbledore appeared to be expecting him.

"Jacqueline already told me of her future plans," said Dumbledore calmly. "She had, in fact, planned to drastically reduce her role in the Magical Mobile Network after the Quidditch World Cup broadcast. Lord Voldemort's return merely accelerated her planned retirement."

"Who will succeed her?" Severus asked.

"Her current business director, most likely," said Dumbledore, blue eyes twinkling. "He already owns twenty percent of the business and was involved in the MMN since the beginning."

Severus wondered who this wizard was. Not one of the students, surely. Only Potter, Granger, Ron Weasley, and Miss Lestrade were involved with the MMN, and the boys didn't strike him as possessing the necessary intelligence- *any* worthwhile intelligence, really- to make a business work.

"Can we trust him?" asked Severus.

"I certainly do," said Dumbledore, eyes still twinkling mischievously. "He is fully cognizant of Lord Voldemort's return, and is working closely with Sherlock."

Severus felt his temper flair up at the mention of Holmes's name.

"Why not you?" said Severus tersely, "Personal differences?"

"I merely know what Sherlock is up to and endorse his plan heartily," said Dumbledore serenely.

"How can he be up to *anything* ?" snapped Severus. "Neglecting his fatherly duties, is he?"

"I believe he is being so active *because* of his fatherly responsibilities," said Dumbledore. "You know, Severus, you can always *ask* if you are curious."

"Has it escaped your mind that I'm your spy to the Dark Lord?" Severus hissed. "There are certain expectations involved in that role and discoursing with Muggles is not one of them!"

"Why, Severus, are you telling me Voldemort has mastered Muggle technology?" said Dumbledore, eyebrows raised. "This is vital intelligence! How could you have forgotten it, I wonder?"

Severus glowered at Dumbledore, who merely beamed at him.

Then, abruptly, Dumbledore turned serious.

"I can, at the moment, act as your intermediary," Dumbledore said sternly. "But there will come a time when you will have to work directly with John and Sherlock if you wish to win your personal war. The inevitability of this could not have escaped you. So choose your actions wisely."

Severus said nothing.

"Regarding Healer Ransom's research and the forthcoming nuptials between him and Jacqueline, I think it is best you inform Voldemort as soon as possible," said Dumbledore, changing the subject.

"As you say," said Severus, relieved at the reprieve.

"You should also inform Voldemort that Jacqueline is thinking to sell the Magical Mobile Network," Dumbledore added.

"Why? She has a successor," said Severus, frowning.

"That does not necessarily mean he will succeed," said Dumbledore cryptically. "At any rate, Ms. Shin intends to make a public announcement about her decision to retire as owner. It is better to give Lord Voldemort the impression he received the information

earlier."

"If you think so," Severus huffed. "But you know what he will do, don't you, when the Dark Lord hears the news?"

"I expect Voldemort will soon seize the opportunity and seek to control the Magical Mobile Network through his Ministry channels, namely through Lucius Malfoy," said Dumbledore.

"And you are fine with this?"

"Frankly, I am not," said Dumbledore, sighing a little. "Indeed, I would rather the Magical Mobile Network never fall into the Ministry of Magic's hands, even for a brief moment. But that decision is out of our hands. There is no point keeping it at the expense of the mind and soul behind it all."

Severus agreed.

"When should I inform the Dark Lord?" Severus asked.

"After you familiarized yourself with Healer Ransom's research," said Dumbledore, looking mischievous again. "I would hate for you to be caught unawares when Lord Voldemort questions you."

"Very well," said Severus curtly.

Severus spent the next eight hours reading articles written by Robert Ransom.

He published a lot, Robert Ransom. Besides the relationship between the immune system and a person's magic, he wrote extensively on the strong correlation between cardiovascular system efficiency and the so-called magic cap. While he wasn't convinced the magic cap was a real thing, reading those articles brought back memories of Watson insisting to Severus that he do 'cardio' back when Watson tried to teach him Muggle Martial Arts.

Severus typed up a text message after he finished reading the exercise regime healer Ransom recommended to wizards and

witches interested in increasing their magic cap. It was, interestingly enough, virtually identical to the one Watson drew up three years ago. Severus worded the text thusly:

It appears you and the best healer in the Wizarding World are in agreement where physical exercise is concerned.

Severus stared at the message at great length. In the end he saved it as a draft. Perhaps he would send it to Watson later.

Severus continued reading until the early hours of the morning. At some point, as he cross-referenced the citations, Severus realised Robert Ransom also went by the name *Robert Dongyi Ju* .

Severus had to sit back in shock for a moment when he discovered this. It wasn't Ransom's fame as the modern day Hua Tou that put him in such a state, though it did have a factor. Robert D. Ju was well known among potioneers for his eccentricity and Gynophobia, due to his inexplicable hatred for all cauldrons and habit of throwing himself out of a window whenever he was stuck in a room that had witches. How, then, did he manage to *stay* in Ms. Shin's proximity? What made her different? Ms. Shin was as far from an attractive beauty as one could get without being stupid and ugly…

Severus was still mulling over the conundrum when he sent his report for the Dark Lord over the MMN (the Dark Lord was very taken by it; the last time Severus had seen him, he was dismantling several older versions of the phone to build a private network only his Death Eaters could use). He would've been content to muse in private except the Dark Lord included in his reply a largely rhetorical and heavily sardonic note as to whether or not he should order one of his Death Eaters to go find the shallow grave in which Shin June Hu must've interred Robert Ransom's body when he visited him, hat in hand, asking for his daughter's hand in marriage.

Severus couldn't help but think the Dark Lord had a point. Because really, never mind courtship, how did Ransom manage to gain *Grandmaster Shin* 's permission to marry his only surviving daughter? Clearly Ransom lived to tell the tale, because Ms. Shin still had a fiancé to marry afterwards.

Severus asked Flitwick over the morning toast if he knew anything about it.

"Well, we did ask," squeaked Flitwick, looking quite a bit amused. "Jacqueline wasn't forthcoming, I'm afraid. She mumbled something about someone shouting ' *take her!* ' far too enthusiastically, but I don't think she was talking about her *father*, considering…"

Severus tried to picture the dour and expressionless Shin June Hu doing this in his head and quickly decided, *no*, impossible.

Severus eventually returned to his coffee. A small flock of Owls descended upon the Great Hall a few minutes later. As though on cue, students, teachers, temporary headmaster (for Durmstrang) and headmistress (Beauxbatons) took out their phone and watched the news.

It soon became clear Severus gave his report to the Dark Lord right on time. The third item in the newscast was Ms. Shin announcing her retirement as the Magical Mobile Network's owner.

Severus was congratulating himself when he heard Ms. Shin's holographic-self named Ronald Weasley as temporary chairman and director.

" *Weasley* ?!" Severus exclaimed before he could stop himself.

He looked around quickly to see if anyone noticed his indiscretion. Luckily, everyone in his proximity appeared just as astonished as Severus at the news, thus were too preoccupied to notice what was going on around them.

Severus turned his attention to the Gryffindor table. He spotted the sixth Weasley child immediately. As usual, he was sitting next to Potter, who sat next to Granger. Perhaps it was just Severus's imagination, but the redhead looked more dimwitted than he did usually. Even as he watched, Weasley, whose eyes looked puffy and whose mouth was full of eggs and bacon from the looks of it, gormlessly reached for a sausage and knocked over a pot of marmalade.

The MMN is doomed, Severus decided.

Ron half-listened to Hermione scold him for tipping over the marmalade pot as he forked another sausage. Damn his elbows, he never seemed to know where they were at a given time…

"Ron, are you listening?" said Hermione.

"Yes," said Ron shortly.

"Well, then, you'd better-"

"Oh what did I do wrong *now* ?" asked Ron irritably.

"Sorry, I only-"

"Did I implode the butter or burn the toast?" Ron snarled. "Look, I didn't get to sleep at all last night, Hermione. I had this five hour phone meeting with Mr. Jeremy, then Harry was telling me about the funny dream he had-"

"No, look!"

Hermione was pointing overhead. Ron and Harry both looked. A handsome screech owl was heading towards their direction.

"Isn't that Hermes?" said Hermione, sounding amazed.

"Blimey, it is!" said Ron, throwing down his fork. "What's Percy writing to me for?"

Hermes flew to the Gryffindor table, landed on the spilled marmalade and held out a leg to which a letter was attached. Ron took the letter off it and the owl departed at once, leaving sticky footprints across the wood.

"That's definitely Percy's handwriting," said Ron staring at the words on the outside of the scroll: *Ronald Weasley, Gryffindor House, Hogwarts* . He looked up at the other two. "What d'you reckon?"

"Open it!" said Hermione eagerly, and Harry nodded.

Ron unrolled the scroll and began to read:

Dear Ron,

I have only just heard (from no less a person than the Minister for Magic himself, who has it from Mr. Lestrange) that it was your *idea to interview Madam Umbridge and show the Wizarding World the steps the Ministry is taking to improve Hogwarts.*

I was most pleasantly surprised when I heard this news and I certainly commend you for doing it. I must admit that I have always been afraid that you would take what we might call the 'Fred and George' route, rather than following in my footsteps, so you can imagine my feelings on hearing you have stopped flouting authority and have decided to show good public spirit.

But I want to give you more than my commendation, Ron. I want to give you some advice, which I am sending knowing full well you will probably share it with your friend Harry Potter.

From what the Minister let slip when telling me what you've done, I gather Harry is rather sceptical towards the ministry, Madam Umbridge in particular. I must tell you, Ron, that he is deeply mistaken. I have no doubt this is a result of Dumbledore's influence. Yes, I know he was considered one of the greatest wizards of our time, but I'm afraid this opinion is now obsolete. In fact, I feel bound to tell you that Dumbledore may not be in charge at Hogwarts much longer. I shall say no more here, but I suggest you read the Daily Prophet after you've finished reading my letter. You will get a good idea of where Dumbledore really stands - and see if you can spot yours truly!

Seriously, Ron, you do not want to be tarred with the same brush as Dumbledore, it could be very damaging to your future prospects, and I am talking here about life after school, too. As you must be aware, considering your heavy involvement in the Magical Mobile Network, the Ministry was seriously considering the possibility of prosecuting your employer Jacqueline Shin for criminally irresponsible conduct. It was a potentially dangerous move,

considering what her father is capable of, but you must understand the Ministry must keep law and order no matter what the cost. Thankfully Ms. Shin has been cooperative and even receptive to the idea of letting the Ministry take over some of its key businesses to ensure what happened at the end of the Second Task of the Triwizard Tournament will never be repeated.

This leads me to my other bit of advice. As I have hinted above, Dumbledore ' s regime at Hogwarts may soon be over. Your loyalty, Ron, should be not to him, but to the school and the Ministry. I am very sorry to hear that, so far, Madam Umbridge is encountering very little cooperation from staff as she strives to make those necessary changes within Hogwarts that the Ministry so ardently desires. I shall say only this-a student who shows himself willing to help Madam Umbridge now may be very well-placed for Prefectship and even Head Boyship in the next couple of years. Also, with the kind of experience you can bring to the table, you would certainly have many offers at the Ministry!

I hope to see you at the Third Task, as I will not be able to see you over the summer. It pains me to criticize our parents, but I am afraid I can no longer live under their roof while they remain mixed up with the dangerous crowd around Dumbledore. (If you are writing to Mother at any point, you might tell her that a certain Sturgis Podmore, who is a great friend of Dumbledore ' s, has recently been sent to Azkaban for trespass at the Ministry. Perhaps that will open their eyes to the kind of petty criminals with whom they are currently rubbing shoulders.) I count myself very lucky to have escaped the stigma of association with such people-the Minister really could not be more gracious to me- and I do hope, Ron, that you will not allow family ties to blind you to the misguided nature of our parents ' beliefs and actions, either. I sincerely hope that, in time, they will realize how mistaken they were and I shall, of course, be ready to accept a full apology when that day comes.

Please think over what I have said most carefully, particularly the bit about Dumbledore, and do try to persuade Harry. If he proves stubborn, then as painful as it may be, I advise you to sever ties with him.

Your brother,

Percy

Harry looked up at Ron.

"Well," Harry said, trying to sound as though he found the whole thing a joke, but failing miserably at it. "Would you-er-what is it? Oh yeah, 'sever ties' with me? Because you know where I stand and will continue to stand."

Ron crumpled the letter between his hands.

"He is-" Ron said jerkily, tearing Percy's letter in half, "the world's-" he tore it into quarters "biggest-" he tore it into eighths " *git* ."

He threw the pieces into a goblet and set them on fire.

Hermione looked at Ron with an odd expression on her face.

"What?" said Ron.

"You still need to write back to Percy, remember," she said, still holding that odd expression. "Here, use my quill."

Ron scowled as he took the quill Hermione offered. What Percy wrote wasn't a surprise, honestly. He kind of expected it, even before Sherlock told him what he wanted Ron to do two weeks ago, because Percy was predictable like that.

The situation rather reminded him of playing chess with Percy, strangely enough. Percy was rubbish at chess, mostly because he couldn't let go of his pieces, and when he did let go of them, it was always the wrong ones. It seemed to forever elude Percy the point of the game was *checking the king*, not retain as many important pieces as possible.

Ron quickly scribbled down his reply on a piece of parchment.

Dear Perce,

Got your note. Talked to Harry a bit. Not sure if I'll keep working for MMN. Miss Jack was going to put me on leave after fourth year. O.W.L.s and all that.

Ron

He paused. If he didn't warn Percy of what was to come, even a little bit, his mother would kill him dead for sure.

Ron dipped his quill into his ink bottle and added a post script:

P.S. I'm planning to sell my ownership shares.

Final Notes : Poor Ron; always underestimated. Snape is a JERK, but an endearing one to write. The trap is set!

The Ministry's Scoop

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Four: The Ministry's Scoop

Percy was lucky Ron replied to his letter before he read the *Daily Prophet* . Ron, Hermione, Harry and Neville scanned the *Daily Prophet* after Ron sent off his reply and they immediately spotted the article Percy hinted at in his letter. It was on the front page, and sported a picture of Hagrid looking extremely shifty.

Education Reform Reveals

Dumbledore's Giant Mistake

Education Decree twenty-two proved its worth after Madam Umbridge, High Inquisitor of Hogwarts, submitted the results of her inspection at the end of March. Madam Umbridge's report revealed to the Ministry that Albus Dumbledore, current headmaster of Hogwarts, made several staff appointments of deeply questionable nature. One example is Rubeus Hagrid, gamekeeper and teaching assistant.

An alarmingly large and ferocious-looking man, Hagrid has used his mysterious influence over Dumbledore to first obtain the position

gamekeeper and then teaching assistant for Care of Magical Creatures. For the last two years Hagrid has been using his position as teaching assistant to terrify the students in his care with a succession of horrific creatures. While Dumbledore turns a blind eye, Hagrid has maimed several pupils while substituting for the regular teacher for Care of Magical Creatures, Professor Kettleburn, in a series of lessons that many admit to being "very frightening."

'I was attacked by a hippogriff, and my friend Vincent Crabbe got a bad bite off a flobberworm," says Draco Malfoy, a fourth-year student. "We all hate Hagrid, but we're just too scared to say anything."

Hagrid has no intention of ceasing his campaign of intimidation, however. In a conversation with Madam Umbridge, he admitted breeding creatures he has dubbed "Blast-Ended Skrewts," highly dangerous crosses between manticores and fire-crabs. The creation of new breeds of magical creature is, of course, an activity usually closely observed by the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Hagrid, however, considers himself to be above such petty restrictions.

"I was just having some fun," he said, when Madam Umbridge questioned him.

As if this were not enough, Madam Umbridge has unearthed evidence that Hagrid is not- as he has always pretended- a pure-blood wizard. He is not, in fact, even pure human. His mother is none other than the giantess Fridwulfa, whose whereabouts are currently unknown.

Bloodthirsty and brutal, the giants brought themselves to the point of extinction by warring amongst themselves during the last century. The handful that remained joined the ranks of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, and they were responsible for some of the worst mass Muggle killings of his reign of terror.

While many of the giants who served He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named were killed by Aurors working against the Dark Side, Fridwulfa was not among them. It is possible she escaped to one of the giant communities still existing in foreign mountain ranges. If his antics

during Care of Magical Creatures lessons are any guide, however, Fridwulfa's son appears to have inherited her brutal nature.

" *The Minister has been growing uneasy about goings-on at Hogwarts for some time and Madam Umbridge's report confirmed his suspicious," said junior Assistant to the Minister, Percy Weasley. "He read the part regarding Rubeus Hagrid with particular alarm and regret. However, he was glad the new legislation for educational reform, which he had pushed for and ratified in March, had proved to be such an immediate success."*

"That's not up to their usual standard," said Harry lightly while Ron, Hermione and Neville sat frozen in their seats, stunned at they had just read. "If this is the best Umbridge can do, she needs to work harder…"

Ron, Hermione and Neville goggled at him.

"What?" Harry said, looking curiously at the three of them.

Ron looked around at Harry.

"Did you know?" he whispered, "About Hagrid being half-giant?"

"No, but I guessed," said Harry. "Sherlock and I always thought he must have a giant up in his family tree. He couldn't be pure giant because they're about twenty feet tall. Anyway, who cares?"

Ron felt like banging his head against the table. Brought up by extremely unconventional Muggles, there were many things he took for granted that were revelations to Harry, but these surprises had become fewer with each successive year. Now, however, once again he ran smack into Harry's appalling ignorance of wizarding culture.

"I'll explain outside," said Ron quietly, "c'mon…"

The four of them left their house table, stopped by the Hufflepuff table to beckon Julia to follow, and finally head out of the Great Hall. As Julia read the offending *Daily Prophet* article, Ron, Harry,

Hermione and Neville looked for an empty classroom. They eventually settled inside classroom eleven.

"So?" Harry prompted Ron. "What's the matter if Hagrid's mother was a giantess?"

"You read the *Prophet* . Giants are… they're…" Ron struggled for words. "… not very nice," he finished lamely.

"Oh, Ron, don't exaggerate," said Hermione as she frowned at Ron. "The *Prophet* said that to raise hysteria. Giants can't all be horrible. It's the same sort of prejudice that people have toward werewolves. It's just bigotry, isn't it? Of course, the problem is the *Prophet* is using exactly that…"

Ron was very tempted to make a scathing reply, but he stopped himself. Now was not the time to start a row with Hermione.

"But there's nothing wrong with Hagrid!" said Harry.

"I know there isn't, but… blimey, no wonder he kept it quiet," Ron said, shaking his head. "I always thought he'd got in the way of a bad Engorgement Charm when he was a kid or something. Didn't like to mention it… Anyway, no one who knows him will care, 'cos they'll know he's not dangerous, but… they're just vicious, giants. It's in their natures. They're like trolls- they just like killing."

Harry stared at him for a long moment.

"Are you saying people will forget everything they know about Hagrid and latch onto the ' *giant* !' part?" he said.

"Uuuuh," said Ron, feeling unsettled at the accuracy of Harry's words, particularly because it seemed to describe his own thinking. "Yeah, I guess."

Harry looked away, looking irate and furious.

"Anyway, how did Umbridge find out?" Ron wondered aloud to cover his own awkwardness. "You don't think Hagrid told her?"

"No," said Hermione. She bright eyes held the same look of fury as

Harry, which somehow that made Ron's stomach hurt. "He never even told us, did he? I bet she forced him to talk against his will, the same way she made Miss Jackie edit our video against her will. Oooh, if she did something illegal, we'll have her…"

"The Ministry's probably covering it up," muttered Harry darkly. "I reckon Fudge is giving her ideas."

"You think he'd go that far?" said Neville, wide-eyed.

"I wouldn't put it past him," said Julia grimly. "Dad told me Fudge thinks Dumbledore will stop at nothing to seize power. He's getting more paranoid about Dumbledore by the day. It's a matter of time before he has Dumbledore arrested on some trumped-up charge."

There was a pause at this.

"We've got to go and see him," said Harry, "As soon as we can. I don't think he was at the Great Hall."

"Let's check," said Neville.

The five of them left classroom eleven and peered into the Great Hall. As they feared, Hagrid was absent from the head table. As they debated whether or not they should hurry over to Hagrid's cabin before heading to their respective first morning classes, Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle accost them at the entrance hall.

"You're not going to see your giant friend in there," said Malfoy, smirking and jerking his thumb back at the Great Hall's double doors. "He's just too ashamed to show his big, ugly face."

"Say what?" said Harry sharply.

"You don't *know* ?" said Malfoy gleefully, shooting derisive look at Ron. "But you run a *news agency…* don't tell me the *Daily Prophet* beat you to it… a bit slow on the uptake, aren't you?"

Malfoy put his hand inside the pocket of his robes and pulled out a folded page of newsprint.

"There you go," he said. "Hate to break it to you, Potter."

"Don't bother," Harry spat. "Your contribution was unbearable. I couldn't help but think if you're going to lie, at least do a good job at it. ' *We all hate Hagrid'* ? And what about the rubbish about him"-he pointed at Crabbe-"getting a bad bite off a *flobberworm* ? They haven't even got teeth!"

Crabbe just sniggered, apparently very pleased with himself.

"Well, I think it is good enough to put an end to the oaf's Hogwarts career," said Malfoy, his eyes glinting. "Half-giant… and there was me thinking he'd just swallowed a bottle of *Skele-Gro* when he was young. None of the mummies and daddies are going to want him here anymore… They'll be worried he'll eat their kids, ha, ha…"

Then Malfoy swaggered off, looking pleased as punch. Ron and Harry tried to go after him, but were prevented; Neville held onto the back of their robes, Hermione grabbed Ron's wand arm and Julia, Harry's.

Ron, Harry, Hermione and Neville's worry over Hagrid hovered over them like a storm cloud all day. Harry kept overpowering his spells throughout Transfiguration, and Neville almost failed his hex-deflection test at Defence Against the Dark Arts, barely managing to scrape through when he successfully cast the shield charm.

They talked to Julia at the Great Hall during dinner. She had Care of Magical Creatures that afternoon, and had offered to check how Hagrid was doing.

"He wasn't there," she said. "Both him and Kettleburn; this woman named Grubbly-Plank substituted. I asked her where they were, and she said Hagrid was indisposed. She didn't say where Kettleburn was."

That evening after dinner, the five of them left the castle and went down through the grounds to Hagrid's cabin. They knocked, and Fang's booming barks answered.

"Hagrid, it's us!" Harry shouted, pounding on the door. "Open up!"

Hagrid didn't answer. They could hear Fang scratching at the door,

whining, but it didn't open. They hammered on it for ten more minutes; Ron even went and banged on one of the windows, but there was no response.

"What's he avoiding us for?" Hermione said when they had finally given up and were walking back to the school. "He surely doesn't think we'd care about him being half-giant?"

But it seemed that Hagrid did care. They didn't see a sign of him the next morning. He didn't appear at the staff table at breakfast, and they didn't see him going about his gamekeeper duties on the grounds. Professor Kettleburn was similarly absent and the older students speculated he'd finally done something that got himself sacked. Professor Grubbly-Plank, an elderly witch with closely cropped grey hair and a very prominent chin, continued to teach the Care of Magical Creatures classes. Malfoy gloated at every possible opportunity.

"Missing your half-breed pal?" he kept whispering to Ron whenever there was a teacher around, so that he was safe from his retaliation. "Missing the elephant man?"

The Friday of that week was also the last day of the spring term. Ron and his friends discussed the chances of seeing Hagrid after Easter Holidays. None of them liked the look of the odds.

"As if we don't have enough worry about," Ron grumbled during lunch. "We're supposed to work on the MMN transfer during the holidays, too…"

"Count your blessings; I have to help Auntie Jack with her *wedding*," Julia snarled.

Ron, Harry and Neville all looked down and kept their mouths firmly shut. Julia was liable to blow up at anyone who mentioned Miss Jack's forthcoming marriage (groom unknown), and even *thinking* about it often led to being attacked by a flock of miniature glass seagulls (Ron still sported the marks from the last pecking attack).

They had a particularly difficult Double Potions class that afternoon. Snape appeared to no more look forward to the start of Holidays

than he would look forward to naming Harry as his heir, and tried to bully Neville worse than ever. Neville refused to give him the satisfaction that his comments were getting to him, however, and that seem to further enrage Snape. Ron wasn't exactly surprised when at the end of class Snape surprised them with an unannounced quiz on antidotes.

"SILENCE!" Snape roared when the whole class let out a noise of protest. "The general standard of your antidotes from last term were abysmal, and have told you since then that I expected to see a great deal more effort. I shall hand out detentions to dunces who get another D."

He turned heel as Malfoy sniggered and said in a carrying whisper, "Some people got a D last term? Ha!"

Determined not to give Snape an excuse to give them detention, Ron and Harry doubled their effort to peek at Hermione's quiz, and Hermione made no moves to hide her answers, even when she noticed their shifting glances. Unfortunately, Neville was as skilled in cheating as he was at Potions. Snape gave him detention after scribbling a large, spiky red 'D' on the centre of his quiz.

"What a way to end a term," said Ron gloomily as they climbed the steps out of the dungeon and made their way across the Entrance Hall. "Poor Neville, I don't think I'd be able to control my stomach if Snape made me clean the dungeon's drains…"

"Why is *she* still here?" Hermione whispered suddenly. "Look!"

She pointed across the Entrance Hall, and Ron saw Madam Umbridge in front of the staffroom. Umbridge was talking to Argus Filch, the caretaker. Filch was perhaps the only person in Hogwarts who liked Umbridge, owing to the fact Umbridge decided his request that students ought to be hung from their ankles as punishment was perfectly reasonable.

Anyway it was indeed odd, Ron thought, that Umbridge was here at Hogwarts when she had finished her Inspections. He watched Umbridge as they came closer to the Great Hall. Umbridge wore a wide smile of callous satisfaction on her face as she listened to what

Filch had to say. But then she looked over, saw them, and dismissed Filch with a wave of her hand.

"Ah, Mr. Potter, just the person I wanted to see," said Umbridge sweetly. "I would like a word with you."

"What for?" snapped Harry.

"To address your tone, for starters," said Umbridge, her toad-like smile widening, "But also your choice in friends. You call Hagrid a friend, don't you?"

" *Yes*," said Harry defiantly.

"We all do," said Hermione, glaring at Umbridge. "Right, Ron?"

Ron looked down, but managed to nod, somehow.

"I feared as much," said Umbridge, clicking her tongue. "Really, Mr. Potter, don't you know half-breeds like Hagrid always take after their non-human parents? Of course, I expected such foolish ignorance from a Muggle-born like *you*, Miss Granger, but you, Mr. Weasley; I thought you would teach your friend better."

Ron saw red at this comment. Harry looked like he could scarcely breath from this outrage and Hermione balled her fists, as though she wanted to put one through Umbridge's broad face.

"You horrible woman," Hermione said, through gritted teeth, "How dare you… how dare you call Hagrid a half-breed!"

"Silence, you silly little girl, don't you know who you are talking to?" said Umbridge coldly, her eyes hardening as they fell on Hermione. "This is precisely why Muggle-borns do not really deserve the privilege of learning magic. No sense of respect and hardly any instinct a wizard-born child naturally has…"

Hermione's eyes flashed.

"Let's go," she said, "c'mon. Harry- Ron…"

They turned heel. Ron glanced back as they walked away.

Umbridge was scribbling furiously on her clipboard.

"She'll be after you next, Hermione," said Ron in a low and worried voice as they walked quickly away from the staffroom.

"She doesn't scare me!" said Hermione defiantly; she was shaking with rage. "I'll show her! Just an ignorant Muggle-born, am I?! Oh, I'll get her back for this…"

"You don't want to go upsetting Umbridge," said Ron nervously. "I'm serious, Hermione, she'll try to get you expelled."

"Let her try!" said Hermione, now striding along so fast that it was all Ron and Harry could do to keep up with her. Ron had never seen Hermione in a rage like this before and it was as terrifying as it was mesmerizing. "And Hagrid isn't hiding anymore! He should never have let that excuse for a human being upset him! Come on!"

Breaking into a run, she led them all out to the grounds, now spotted with new grass, and to Hagrid's cabin. The curtains were still drawn, and they could hear Fang barking as they approached.

"Hagrid!" Hermione shouted, pounding on his front door. "Hagrid, that's enough! We know you're in there! Nobody cares if your mum was a giantess, Hagrid! You can't let that foul Umbridge do this to you! Hagrid, get out here, you're just being-"

The door opened. Hermione said, "About t-!" and then stopped, very suddenly, because she had found herself face-to-face, not with Hagrid, but with Albus Dumbledore.

"Good afternoon," he said pleasantly, smiling down at them.

"We- *er* -we wanted to see Hagrid," said Hermione in a rather small voice.

"Yes, I surmised as much," said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. "Why don't you come in?"

"Oh… um… okay," said Hermione.

She, Ron, and Harry went into the cabin; Fang launched himself

upon Harry the moment he entered, barking madly and trying to lick his ears. Harry fended off Fang as Ron looked around.

Hagrid was sitting at his table, where there were two large mugs of tea. He looked a real mess. His face was blotchy, his eyes swollen, and he had gone to the other extreme where his hair was concerned; far from trying to make it behave, it now looked like a wig of tangled wire.

"Hi, Hagrid," said Harry.

Hagrid looked up.

"'Lo," he said in a very hoarse voice.

"More tea, I think," said Dumbledore, closing the door behind Ron, Harry, and Hermione, drawing out his wand, and twiddling it; a revolving tea tray appeared in midair along with a plate of cakes. Dumbledore magicked the tray onto the table, and everybody sat down. There was a slight pause, and then Dumbledore said, "Did you by any chance hear what Miss Granger was shouting, Hagrid?"

Hermione went slightly pink, but Dumbledore smiled at her and continued, "Hermione, Harry, and Ron still seem to want to know you, judging by the way they were attempting to break down the door."

"Of course we still want to know you!" Harry said, staring at Hagrid. "You don't think anything that Umbitc- sorry, Professor," he added quickly, looking at Dumbledore.

"I have gone temporarily deaf and haven't any idea what you said, Harry," said Dumbledore, twiddling his thumbs and staring at the ceiling.

"Er-right," said Harry sheepishly. "I just meant-Hagrid, how could you think we'd care what the ministry or what that- *woman* -says about you?"

Two fat tears leaked out of Hagrid's beetle-black eyes and fell slowly into his tangled beard.

"Living proof of what I've been telling you, Hagrid," said Dumbledore, still looking carefully up at the ceiling. "I have shown you the letters from the countless parents who remember you from their own days here, telling me in no uncertain terms that if I allowed the Ministry to sacked you, they would have something to say about it-"

"Not all of 'em," said Hagrid hoarsely. "Not all of 'em wan me ter stay."

"Really, Hagrid, if you are holding out for universal popularity, I'm afraid you will be in this cabin for a very long time," said Dumbledore, now peering sternly over his half-moon spectacles. "Not a week has passed since I became headmaster of this school when I haven't had at least one owl complaining about the way I run it, and this past month I have been practically inundated with owls bearing complaints. But what should I do? Barricade myself in my study and refuse to talk to anybody?"

"Yeh-yeh're not half-giant!" said Hagrid croakily.

"Only mad and going senile, according to *Daily Prophet*," said Professor Dumbledore calmly. "The tendency may run in my family. My own brother, Aberforth, was prosecuted for practicing inappropriate charms on a goat. It was all over the papers, but did we Dumbledore brothers hide? No, we did not! Aberforth in fact held his head high and went about his business as usual! Of course, I'm not entirely sure he can read, so that may not have been bravery…"

"Come back and teach, Hagrid," said Hermione quietly, "please come back, we really miss you."

Hagrid gulped. More tears leaked out down his cheeks and into his tangled beard.

Dumbledore stood up. "I refuse to accept your resignation, Hagrid, and I expect you back at work at the end of Easter Holidays," he said. "You will join me for breakfast at eight thirty in the Great Hall. No excuses. Good afternoon to you all."

Dumbledore left the cabin, pausing only to scratch Fangs ears. When the door had shut behind him, Hagrid began to sob into his

dustbin-lid-sized hands. Hermione kept patting his arm, and at last, Hagrid looked up, his eyes very red indeed, and said, "Great man, Dumbledore… great man…"

"Yeah, he is," said Ron. "Can I have one of these cakes, Hagrid?"

"Help yerself," said Hagrid, wiping his eyes on the back of his hand. "Ar, he's righ', o' course-yeh're all righ'… I bin stupid… my ol' dad woulda bin ashamed o' the way I've bin behavin'…" More tears leaked out, but he wiped them away more forcefully, and said, "Never shown you a picture of my old dad, have I? Here…"

Hagrid got up, went over to his dresser, opened a drawer, and pulled out a picture of a short wizard with Hagrid's crinkled black eyes, beaming as he sat on top of Hagrid's shoulder. Hagrid was a good seven or eight feet tall, judging by the apple tree beside him, but his face was beardless, young, round, and smooth-he looked hardly older than eleven.

"Tha was taken jus' after I got inter Hogwarts," Hagrid croaked. "Dad was dead chuffed… thought I migh' not be a wizard, see, 'cos me mum…"

Ron choked on the cake he bit into as he rather irrelevantly wondered how Hagrid's tiny dad and his giant mum went about… making Hagrid.

"'Course, I never was great shakes at magic, really," Hagrid went on over Ron's choking noises. "But at least he never saw me expelled. Died, see, in me second year…

"Dumbledore was the one who stuck up for me after Dad went. Got me the gamekeeper job… trusts people, he does. Gives 'em second chances… tha's what sets him apar' from other heads, see. He'll accept anyone at Hogwarts, s'long as they've got the talent. Knows people can turn out okay even if their families weren'… well… all tha' respectable. But some don' understand that. There's some who'd always hold it against yeh… there's some who'd even pretend they just had big bones rather than stand up an' say- I am what I am, an' I'm not ashamed. 'Never be ashamed,' my ol' dad used ter say, 'there's some who'll hold it against you, but they're not worth

botherin' with.' An' he was right. I've bin an idiot. I'm not botherin' with her no more, I promise yeh that. Big bones… I'll give her big bones."

Ron, Harry and Hermione stared at each other bewilderingly for a second until a look of horrified epiphany crawled all over Hermione's face. Ron wasn't sure if he wanted to know what she figured out, but decided to ask her later nevertheless.

"Yeh know wha, Harry?" Hagrid said, looking up from the photograph of his father, his eyes very bright, "when I firs' met you, you reminded me o' me a bit. Mum an' Dad gone, an' you was feelin' like yeh wouldn' fit in at Hogwarts, remember? Not sure yeh were really up to it… an' now look at yeh, Harry! Best spell-caster Hogwarts has ever seen in decades!"

He looked at Harry for a moment. Then he turned to all three of them and said, very seriously, "Yeh know what I'd love? I'd love ter see Jack's company really succeed, I really would. It'd show 'em all… Yeh don' have ter be all put t'gether to do it, and yeh don' have ter be pureblood ter do it, either. Yeh don have ter be ashamed of what yeh are. It'd show 'em Dumbledore's the one who's got it righ', lettin' anyone in as long as they can do magic. How is the MMN going, Ron?"

"Great," said Ron, not meeting Hagrid's eye. "Really great."

Hagrid's miserable face broke into a wide, watery smile.

"Tha's my boy… you show 'em, Ron, you show 'em. Don' let the Ministry pull it down…"

Lying to Hagrid wasn't quite like lying to anyone else. Ron shot a miserable look at Harry and Hermione, and they gave him an equally anguished look. Hagrid would be devastated when Sherlock's plan went into full bloom, but then again, they didn't dare tell Hagrid what they were doing. Hagrid was horrible at keeping secrets, as they well knew from the way Quirrell was able to get information about Fluffy from Hagrid back when they were first years.

Hermione was first to break. "Listen, Hagrid-"

Ron shot her a furious quelling look as Hagrid looked at them curiously.

"I'm actually thinking to start another business," said Ron loudly.

" *Another* one?" said Hagrid, surprised. "On top of MMN and the broadcastin' one?"

"Yeah," said Ron. "I'm going to start working on it with Fred and George over Easter."

"Those two?" said Hagrid, his bushy eyebrows raised. "Wha' is it about?"

"Well, Fred and George, they wanted to start a joke shop," Ron explained. "They've got a load of good stuff to sell and there's definitely a market… Only problem is, they don't have enough money to start it right now, not even a mail-order business. My mum has the same problem. She has a roaring trade going on, selling enchanted baby products, but she can't do all the mailing with Erroll."

Hagrid nodded.

"Miss Jackie and her fiancé developed a thing that would help," Ron went on. "They call it 'The Magic Egg'. No, don't ask," he added quickly when Hermione opened her mouth, "they're both horrible at naming things and I have no idea why eggs are relevant… Anyway, if the thing works, it, uh, might get even bigger than the MMN."

Hagrid looked both surprised and delighted.

"… Even bigger than the MMN, yeh say? You sure?"

Ron nodded firmly. "Dead sure."

Hagrid patted his back, making Ron land face-first into a cake.

"Good man!" growled Hagrid, beaming. "Yeh can do it, Ron, I know yeh can… Jack didn' make yeh business director fer nothin'…"

Final Notes : Poor Hagrid. But be of good cheer; judgment will start raining down on Umbridge in the next chapter.

There is a website that inspired the 'magic egg'. Do you know what it is? ;)

ASIM is two years old! Thirty five additional chapters since last year! I'm slacking off :(

Countdown

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Five: Countdown

Harry and all of his friends left Hogwarts for the Easter holidays. Harry felt like a tight cord in his gut unwind as he boarded Hogwarts Express, and fell asleep as soon as he and his friends settled in an empty compartment.

He woke up some unaccountable time later. He noted Ron, Ginny and Neville were playing Exploding-snap, Hermione had her nose buried in a book titled *From the Symposium of Magical Security*, and Julia was poring over her phone.

"How long was I out?" Harry asked.

"About two hours," said Julia, looking up. "And don't worry about it. You looked like you needed the nap."

"We all had a bit of shut-eye," said Neville, whose eyebrows were singed off. "March was hard for everyone."

That was true. Hogwarts as a whole became very subdued since Umbridge entered it like a pink, toad-shaped Dementor, sucking out the life and vitality from the people around her, particularly the teachers. Professor Trelawney, the Divinations teacher, was having

a particularly hard time at it, from what Neville told them. According to Neville, she often looked drunk and kept making hysterical comments about being too incompetent to do such-and-such a task in class after Umbridge submitted her inspection report.

Harry joined Ron, Ginny and Neville after a bit of stretching. After their second game, Hermione asked a question:

"Did Sherlock give you any updates?"

Ron froze a second in the middle of dealing the cards, Neville dropped the deck he was holding, and Ginny stared fixedly at Harry.

"The last call I had, he only talked about bees," said Harry.

Hermione frowned. " *Bees* ? Is this some kind of code?"

Harry shook his head. "He literally talked about bees, as in the insect."

"… He's not thinking about the case at all?!" asked Hermione, looking thoroughly alarmed.

"No," said Harry, before adding quickly. "That means everything we can do for the case is *done*, so he doesn't have to think about it anymore."

Hermione let out a long breath, looking indignant. Harry supposed she would have trouble accepting Sherlock's ability to completely detach on command. Most people got frustrated at it-after all, the vast majority would fret over an unresolved high-stake case even when the winds were warm.

The train arrived at King's Cross station in due time. John, Sherlock (who was carrying Benedict in a sling) and Sirius were waiting at platform nine and three quarters, as well as Mr. Lestrade and Ron's parents. Mrs. Weasley gasped when she spotted Harry.

"Oh, Harry, dear, your *hair* !" she cried, pointing a shaky finger at it.

Harry ran a hand through his hair and smiled sheepishly. "Yeah, it turned grey."

"I didn't realise it turned *this* grey," said John, staring rather pointedly, "Looks more than 80% *white* ."

That comment made Harry feel more worried about the state of his hair. "Maybe I should dye it."

"You can try different colours," said Sirius, looking mischievous. "Why don't we go through the rainbow?"

Harry was all for it until he saw the looks on Hermione, Julia and Ginny's faces. Hermione was glancing sideways, and Julia and Ginny looked like as though were silently screaming: " *NO* !"

"Eh, maybe not," said Harry.

Sirius looked disappointed. "You know, your father would've considered it great fun."

"I don't," said Sherlock.

"I didn't mean you," snapped Sirius.

" *Obviously*," Sherlock sneered.

"Break it off, you two," growled Mr. Lestrade before Sirius could retort. "Some of us need to go home."

"Yes, we need to return you to your henpecked existence," drawled Sherlock.

Mr. Lestrade glared at him. "You know what? You can take a cab home, I un-invite you. John, take your baby."

Sherlock wrapped his arms around Benedict before John could take him out of his sling. While they struggled against each other, Harry couldn't help but notice there was a lump on John's jacket, right under left armpit. Considering the current situation, and the location and size of the hidden object, this could only mean one thing.

"I guess we're not safe yet," murmured Harry in the back of Mr. Lestrade car, after saying goodbye to the Weasleys, Hermione and Neville (Sherlock invited himself to the ride).

"Why do you say so?" asked Julia.

Harry told her. Julia blinked at him for a moment.

"You know, Harry, most fourteen-year-olds can't tell if someone is in possession of a *hidden firearm*," she said.

Harry shrugged. "Blame my parents."

They had lively drive through London. John asked about their term, and Harry and Julia immediately spoke abuse about Umbridge. Apparently Umbridge was as pleasant at the Ministry as she was at Hogwarts, because Mr. Lestrade joined in, too.

Mr. Lestrade dropped off everyone except Julia at Baker Street. Sirius went downstairs to his basement flat, muttering something about waiting for Remus. Harry, John and Sherlock (plus Benedict) went upstairs. Harry plopped his wheeled trunk next to the fireplace, Sherlock stopped by the kitchen, and John deposited Benedict into his enchanted high chair before everyone settled in the living room.

"We replaced your wardrobe," said Sherlock as he handed out the tea.

"Great, it only took a year," Harry muttered.

Sherlock glared at him briefly. "Wardrobes are a considerable investment, especially when you're a wizard. Go have a look."

"Now?" said Harry, startled.

"Yes, now," said Sherlock firmly.

So Harry went upstairs to his bedroom. There he found Dr. Robert shoving a stout wardrobe made of dark wood in the corner where Harry's old, broken wardrobe used to be. Harry inconsequently noted Dr. Robert wasn't dressed as badly as he normally did, when left on his own devises-the combination of white T-shirt, blindingly-blue jogging bottoms and black running shoes weren't too straining to the eyes.

"It's made of Walnut wood," said Dr. Robert when John, Sherlock

and Benedict joined Harry at his bedroom.

" *Don't* answer questions I have no intention of asking," snapped Sherlock, which only made Dr. Robert grin.

"So you're a carpenter in your spare time?" said John.

"I don't make the cabinets personally," said Dr. Robert, in a tone that suggested he felt offended at John for thinking he possessed either the skills or the time to devote to carpentry.

"I thought we can't have one because we're a Muggle household!" said Harry.

"A non-magic person can't buy one in behalf of a magical family member if the household is primarily Muggle," Dr. Robert corrected. "That doesn't stop *you* from owning one, especially when I'm not charging you."

"Oh," said Harry. "Uh, thanks. But why are you-"

Dr. Robert ignored him and opened the wardrobe's door. Harry smelled a whiff of ozone.

"After you," said Dr. Robert, gesturing at the empty wardrobe's interior. "Just take one step in."

Harry stepped into the wardrobe, feeling a bit stupid as he stared at the wooden wall inches away from his nose. Then he took another step forward, and instead of hitting solid wood, he found himself plunged into darkness and his feet touching nothing.

Harry wasn't alone for long. Soon John, Sherlock and Dr. Robert joined him in the void, no longer dark thanks to the balls of white fire dancing around Dr. Robert's head.

"Spatial arbitrage," said Sherlock smugly. "We are in the in-between space. Unless our enemies know where we are headed-in this case, we are headed to nowhere in particular-they can't access here. Therefore, it precludes any and all eavesdropping attempts."

"But if we're going to nowhere in particular, doesn't that mean we're

stuck here?" asked Harry.

"What is the best place to head to when you don't know where you ought to go?" asked Sherlock.

Harry thought about it. "… Home?"

"Yep," said Dr. Robert, nodding. "Just so you know, I made these wardrobes to take you back home if or when you enter the in-between space without any destination in mind."

Harry nodded slowly. "So if I take a step forward…"

"You'll walk out of the same wardrobe as you stepped into," said Dr. Robert. "Bit of a mind-screw, yeah?"

Harry certainly felt like his head was spinning. Floating as though he was in zero-gravity certainly didn't help.

"So why are we here?" asked Harry uncomfortably.

"To talk about finances," said Sherlock. "Do you know why Jacqueline is selling the Magical Mobile Network?"

"Besides her getting married and the work involved killing her slowly, no," said Harry. Then he looked at Dr. Robert, "Um, congratulations."

"Thank you," said Dr. Robert twitchily.

Harry hesitated for a second. There was something he wondered about, ever since he heard the (un)happy announcement. Did the engagement mean Dr. Robert figured out a way to…?

"Yes, I figured out a way to teach you Dao-ga," said Dr. Robert. "Your mother approved the training. I'll get back to you on that later. Your father looks like he can't wait to pontificate his brilliance."

"Yeah, go ahead and tell us, Sherlock," said John indulgently.

Sherlock glowered at them all before he started speaking.

"The Ministry of Magic has been coveting the MMN since it started," Sherlock said. "Bringing a profit of over a million Galleons a month at the paltry expense of thirty-eight thousand Galleons a year, it is a company whose profitability is without peer. The Ministry knew its potential and thus tried to acquire it through legal technicalities. When they failed to do so, the Ministry did its best to milk a share of the profits by imposing and increasing number of regulatory laws, particularly in regards to Floo powder and IT usage."

Harry nodded. Though he had little knowledge of the business side of the MMN, Ron often complained about how the Ministry kept changing the laws regarding Floo powder, just recently imposing a commission tax on any magical transport/communication method that used Floo powder as a medium.

"The recent scandal gave the Ministry ample opportunity to meddle directly," Sherlock went on. "The restrictions they can and will impose in the name of avoiding future scandals will make the running cost and legal bother unbearable. Hence Jacqueline made the decision to cut off the company before the Ministry has time to ratify these restrictions so they won't encumber her in the future."

"But that's letting them win!" said Harry indignantly.

"Certain sacrifices are necessary," said Sherlock sternly. "Think carefully, Harry: The MMN going on sale now is a golden opportunity for the Ministry of Magic-and in extension LV-to gain full control. But there is a problem: even at a discount, the Magical Mobile Network is enormously expensive."

"How much is Jacqueline asking?" John asked.

"Twelve million Galleons," said Mr. Lestrade, who suddenly appeared in the in-between space. "That's roughly half the Ministry's entire annual revenue."

Harry gaped at him and John whistled. "There is no way the Ministry can afford that," said John.

"Nope," said Mr. Lestrade, grinning rakishly.

"The Ministry still has ways to raise money, though none of their options are wise," said Sherlock. "They could try to buy on margin and get a loan from Gringotts, but that would alert the Goblins, and we can reasonably expect the bank to do their best to buy the MMN themselves. In fact, if the news of the sale goes out, a veritable storm of potential buyers will emerge from the international market. Therefore the Ministry has to move quickly and completely in secret in order to secure the purchase."

"Couldn't they get a loan without telling Gringotts what they need the money for?" asked Harry.

"The Goblins won't loan any money to the Ministry," said Mr. Lestrade. "They're pissed off at them because of Ludo Bagman. They think the Ministry helped him escape so they can cover up the fact he skimmed off Ministry funds to pay off his personal debts."

"What if they use the Imperius Curse to force Miss Jackie to just hand it over?" Harry asked again.

"They can't," said Sherlock, smirking. "The Ministry wasted their one and only opportunity when they enchanted Jacqueline to make her cooperate-as if she wouldn't, even at her normal state. With her father understandably on the warpath, they will dare not try again. That leaves…"

"… Private loans," said John, while Harry struggled to think. "Can't you imagine it happening? The Ministry can offer an underhand deal to the rich and powerful, promising them a slice of the profits in exchange for investment money. Fudge is already in cahoots with Lucius Malfoy, so I wouldn't be surprised if Fudge had a bunch of private meetings with him recently."

"He had," Mr. Lestrade confirmed. "Arthur's twin boys gave me this thing called Extendable Ears- made eavesdropping into the Minister's office easy-peasy. Anyway, I recorded all the meetings. Sounded like all the 'reformed' Death Eaters are pitching into the deal."

John smirked. "So when are you going to make this public?"

"After my next press conference," said Mr. Lestrade, grinning back. "I've got one scheduled before the deal the Ministry signed goes in effect. What I'm going to say is not going to make the Ministry look good."

"So we've got a humiliation conga line going. Nice," said John.

Harry clutched his head as he felt as though his mind was blown.

So *this* was Sherlock's plan… offer to the Ministry of Magic the much coveted Magical Mobile Network when it was in turmoil- which they themselves generated to show Lord Voldemort's return- so the Ministry would think they are getting the company at a bargain price, even when the offering price was well beyond their means. Rather than pass the opportunity, Voldemort would order his Death Eaters- Lucius Malfoy- to offer to finance the buyout to Fudge or Fudge would offer the deal to Mr. Malfoy… either way, the result would be the same. The Wizarding World would rise in anger against such blatant corruption, and call for the Death Eaters involved to be imprisoned. That would leave Lord Voldemort almost completely without resources!

There was one problem, however.

"But we're going to lose the MMN," said Harry.

"We will," said Sherlock. "But we can more than afford to lose it. Ask your friend Ron why."

Harry nodded slowly. Dr. Robert made thoughtful humming noise.

"I wonder if this is what the guys in the FBI felt like before Watergate," he remarked.

About an hour after the meeting at Baker Street (sort of), Ron Weasley entered his twin brothers Fred and George's room at the Burrow. He managed to dodge the self-Propelling Custard Pie, which flung itself at Ron's face the moment he opened the door, but then he got drenched under a localized rainstorm when the Weather in a Bottle perched on the doorframe tipped over.

"Why'd you booby trap your room?" asked Ron furiously.

"Why'd you enter without knocking?" George shot back.

"Our little Ronnie-kins has no manners," said Fred, shaking his head. "Perhaps we should teach him some."

"Prats," growled Ron as mopped his face. "I've half a mind to not tell you Miss Jack wants to invest in your shop."

There was a short pause while Fred and George goggled at Ron, who took the time to shut the door behind him.

"… Miss Jack wants to invest in our joke shop?" Fred repeated, looking flabbergasted.

"Yeah," said Ron. "You two can talk to her later, but she'll probably give you whatever you ask as long as you show her why you need it."

"She's mental," Fred said in an almost awed voice.

"She is, a bit," said Ron. "But she's not stupid. If she thinks you're worth investing, you are. So just take it. Just don't tell mum."

The twins stared at him.

"So how is it going to work?" George asked.

"The joke shop will be yours," Ron said. "But you're going to hire one of Miss Jack's businesses to run it."

"She has more than one?" said Fred.

Ron nodded. "Yep."

"How many does she have?" asked George.

"Three, if you count the one she'll launch this week," said Ron.

"What is it?" asked Fred.

"It's an instant delivery service," said Ron. "The basic idea is…

customer orders stuff from a virtual store on the MMN network, the owner of the virtual store receives the order, puts the merchandise in a box and then sends the box to the customer through the MMN, at which point they receive payment. The customer gets box and *tada*, they have what they ordered."

There was a short pause.

"That's… really brilliant," muttered George. "It's like a mail-carrier service without owls… and a lot faster."

"Basically," said Ron.

"I guess she wants us to test it out?" said Fred shrewdly. "I suppose that makes sense, since it'll make money from the sellers. It'll do as well as the quality of the sellers, eh?"

"Uh-huh," said Ron. "She calls the company 'The Magic Egg', by the way. No, that's not the final name. I'm pushing for *Zing ®*."

George nodded. "So what's the third company?" he asked.

"Magi Information Technology Solutions… MIT-S for short," Ron said. "On paper, the Magical Mobile Network pays MIT-S for their muggle technology services. In practice, Miss Jack handles everything."

"Why bother separating the two?" asked Fred.

"The MMN isn't the only client MIT-S has; Gringotts is one," Ron answered.

"Why does *Gringotts* need Muggle technology?" George asked, frowning.

"Gringotts has a branch in the Muggle world," Ron explained. "They use it as a front to exchange their Muggle money to gold. It ran into problems these past few years because all Muggle banks use computers and Gringotts needed to do the same to maintain cover. The goblin in charge of opening a vault for the MMN asked me if they could hire Miss Jack to set something up for them. Long story short, Miss Jack started MIT-S to manage Gringotts Bank's muggle

technology requirements."

Fred and George nodded.

"I suppose it wouldn't make sense to handle Muggle Technology under a wizarding telephone company," said Fred. "Now how does Miss Jack find the time to run three businesses?"

"She doesn't have to do much for the MIT-S," said Ron. "She hired a bunch of Muggles who do most of the work."

"Isn't that expensive?"

"It is," said Ron. "But MIT-S is still super-profitable. I'm not sure how or why. Miss Jack tried to explain it to me, but all I got is that the company is a combination of a bank and a library- the clients pay Miss Jack huge sums to store their information and move it around. Anyway, the MIT-S keeps track of all the MMN customer accounts, calls and whatnot."

Both Fred and George abruptly went still.

"Wait a minute," said George slowly. "Does this mean the Magical Mobile Network is only as good as the MIT-S?"

"Yeah," said Ron blandly.

"Is the MIT-S under contract?" asked Fred.

"No, they can fire their clients at will," said Ron.

Identical evil grins spread across the twins' faces.

"Would the MIT-S provide their services to the MMN if the Ministry of Magic owns it?" George asked.

"Probably not," said Ron, shrugging.

Fred and George nodded. Then they placed a hand over their respective hearts solemnly.

"Ron, I'm think we can finally acknowledge you as our brother," said

Fred. "We've been denying it, you know."

Ron frowned, "For how long?"

"Weeks."

"Months."

" *Years*…"

"Gits," huffed Ron.

In a quiet residential area in USA, thousands of miles away from Magical Britain and its turmoil, there was a man and a woman quietly sitting next to each other on a couch. Their hands were tightly clasped, though they neither spoke nor looked at each other. Instead they kept their eyes affixed to the expansive white wall opposite to them, where one could see two projections.

The first projection showed a handsome middle-aged man with white-hair, who was seated behind a golden plaque that the bore the name DCI Lestrade. The man announced to his unseen audience that the controversial footage showing the apparent resurrection of Lord Voldemort ("He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named") originated from the hidden cameras the Department of Magical Law Enforcement installed in Little Hangleton, a small village in Northern England. They had put it there for a case involving a Muggle named Frank Bryce, who had been killed by the Killing Curse last year, but completely forgotten about it.

The second projection was completely black, but there were voices coming from the source of the projection. An anxious-sounding man rambled at length how expensive the purchase was. A girlish voice assured him it was bargain, the owner merely asked for half a year's worth of revenue, and the Ministry would recuperate the expense in no time, especially since the business would be in better hands. The first man retorted, "We would've never had to spend so much if you, Dolores, just let Miss Shin cooperate on her own initiative, seeing as she had the personality of a doormat. I will have your head,

Dolores," the first man continued fiercely, "if this turns out to be another mistake; your past ones have been costly to cover. And though I won't inquire how you secured Jacqueline's cooperation the first time, I won't cover you if it goes public." At which point a drawling voice said, "It was all very unfortunate, but Minister, you still achieved your objective, and I am very glad to have been able to help you out."

"Robert," the woman said abruptly. "Even if You-Know-Who wasn't a factor, I would've…"

"I know," the man named Robert said softly. "You know I know, Jacqueline."

The two fell silent again. The projections continued to show their footages in repeat. In the background, next to the projectors, a rack of servers and several desktop computers blinked and hummed.

When the clock hanging on an adjacent wall turned seven, Robert looked at Jacqueline and said, "It's time."

Jacqueline nodded once. She released the hand clutching Robert's, silently walked over to one of the desktops- the one connected to a monitor- and typed something rapidly on the accompanying keyboard. Then she paused for a second, a thin finger poised.

Then she pressed enter.

"It's done," Jacqueline murmured.

Final Notes : I'm not done with Umbridge. Nope.

I went a bit overboard ironing out the details of wizarding world's economy, UK magical population, and Ministry budget. In case you're wondering about the numbers, here is how I got them:

Various estimates for the British Wizarding World population range from 10,000 to 60,000 (JKR once said the UK has three thousand wizards at an interview, but doesn't make sense). Based on the lower estimate of just over ten thousand, I decided Jacqueline has

around 9000 domestic users with an additional 2000 international customers (a very modest size for an enterprise). Like most mobile phone companies, Jack offers a variety of plans, but most opt for the 5G/month plan ($41/month). So that's 550K of revenue a month just from *telephony* . Her users can subscribe to the news service and a basic form of TV (Jeremy ended up opening the sport channel after all) with an additional 4-5G a month. Hence the monthly revenue of the MMN is 1Million.

The 38K expense figure is what a mid-size IT company in the US would spend annually. Jack would probably spend considerably less in operating costs since she doesn't have to run a website and doesn't employ a lot people, but she pays huge sums in taxes because of Ministry regulations. Now speaking of the Ministry…

It was hard to think up a reasonable number as the annual revenue for the Ministry of Magic since its *government*, and there is virtually no data on how wizards and witches are taxed. In the end I just used the annual revenue of UK from previous years and divided it by 5566, since Muggles outnumber Wizards by 5,566:1. I admit this is arbitrary.

Pulling the Plug

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Six: Pulling the Plug

Harry spent the first five days of Easter Holidays getting his homework done. The load seemed at least twice as large from the previous years, and Harry knew O.W.L.s weren't solely to blame. Voldemort and the Ministry's machinations took away a large chunk of the time he should be spending on school work, and his marks reflected this. For the first time since he started Hogwarts, Harry barely managed to scrape an Acceptable for most of his classes (which for Potions was an *improvement*, ironically enough).

"We know why you're having trouble, so don't worry about it," said John after reading his report card. "Just do well in the finals. That's what counts, after all."

Harry grumbled getting high marks in his final exams was not an easy matter, but nevertheless vowed to catch up, as he had no desire to give either the Ministry or Voldemort the honour of causing him to fail. Harry asked Sirius and his best friend Remus for help, and they rose magnificently to the occasion. Sirius in particular seemed to relish in the time together, even though it was for something as boring as homework.

"I'm glad to know you're not struggling over the material, Harry,"

Remus said as Harry tackled his Transfiguration essay. "Professor McGonagall and Flitwick have been worrying about you."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"They noticed your essays were, I quote, *shoddier* and you had difficulty mastering spells," said Remus. "Since this happened shortly after Benedict was born, they wondered if you were having trouble adjusting to having a sibling."

Harry gaped after hearing this. He didn't put much thought into how his teachers perceived him-except, of course, Severus Snape, whose opinion of Harry had been absolutely clear since day one-but he didn't think they would put much thought into him; regardless of what the *Daily Prophet* said, he was just over average, meaning he was neither interesting nor worrisome.

"I managed to convince them you love Benedict very much and enjoy his presence immensely," Remus continued. "This led them to speculate the negative effects of Rita Skeeter's articles. I left them at that."

"I didn't even know she was writing about me until that fight at the entrance hall," said Harry honestly.

Remus smiled wryly. "Well, you certainly had deeper things to worry about at that point."

"But not anymore," said Harry savagely. "Sherlock's plan is working. After Voldemort goes down, we can start working to get rid of every last piece of him…"

"That's the spirit," said Sirius, ruffling Harry's hair. "We'll have a laugh over Voldemort and his Death Munchers before summer, I just know it. And, Merlin, I would love to be a fly on wall when LV learns a Muggle outsmarted him…"

"Very tempting," Remus agreed. "But for the sake of John and Sherlock's safety, let's hope he never does."

The three of them spent some time talking about what they wanted to do after Sherlock's plan came to full fruition. Sirius mentioned

overseas trips to exotic places (he quite liked Thailand and wanted to go there for reasons other than hunting down drug runners). Then he elbowed Remus in the ribs, and slyly asked if he would collabourate with his pretty and young cousin *Dora* for his Defence Against the Dark Arts classes next year. Remus held himself in a very dignified way and confirmed, yes, he was planning to, which Harry thought was quite a bold response for him.

"What about you, Harry?" Sirius asked. "Are there any girls that strike your fancy?"

"No," said Harry.

" *No* ?" said Sirius in disbelief. "There is no one now? No one before? C'mon, there has to be at least *one*…"

Harry shook his head. There were girls he thought looked very pretty, of course, but that didn't mean he had to do something about it. Moreover, he handled too many stupid cases where men acted in the most idiotic ways for beautiful woman to fall for the first pretty girl that came in sight.

"What about Arthur Weasley's daughter? Isn't she cute?" Sirius persisted.

"Maybe, I don't know," said Harry indifferently. "Can we not talk this? I have to get this done."

Sirius scowled. "You don't think girls are gross, do you?"

"No, and that's even after I got the Talk," said Harry.

"You got the cauldrons and wands talk? Who did it? John?" asked Remus, as Sirius's eyebrows ascended.

Harry felt a bit evil as he told them the truth. "No, Sherlock."

Sirius and Remus's jaws dropped.

"It was an hour long," said Harry casually. "There was a slideshow, and he used models."

Sirius and Remus never brought up the subject again after that.

Harry eventually finished all his homework. He might have done it faster if he hadn't spent many hours taking inspirational showers or his head down on the table quietly despairing over the likelihood of ever getting the work done. But get it done he did; Harry proclaimed as much after throwing down his biro and punching the air in victory. Then he slumped back into his chair and sat there limply with his head thrown back.

John, who often sat across Harry writing blog posts or feeding Benedict while he worked, chuckled at the sight of him.

"Good job, you," she said. "Fancy a walk? I need some air."

Harry agreed. He flopped out of his chair, rolled on the ground, and rose to his feet like a stiff-limbed zombie. John shrugged on a coat and left Benedict with Sherlock, who didn't budge from his spot at the kitchen, poring over his microscope.

They went to Regent's Park. As they roamed around the grounds, it suddenly occurred to Harry that the last time he and John took a casual stroll was four years ago, the day before he left for Hogwarts as a wide-eyed firstie. Had it really been that long? Harry thought, as the grinned at the herons.

"What are you laughing at?" asked John.

"Nothing," said Harry. "I just… it felt like *before*, when it was just me and you and Sherlock."

John gave him an inscrutable look. "It's been a while since we had just me and you time, hasn't it? Sorry about that."

"It's okay!" said Harry quickly. "We're going to have plenty of time soon! Just a few more months and it'll be over… well, mostly over."

John made a vague accenting noise. It filled Harry with an unfathomable dread.

"You *don't* think…?"

"Call me paranoid, but I don't think I'll be able to relax until LV is well and truly dead," said John flatly. "Especially since LV won't die even if you put a bullet through his head at this point. He's worse than a zombie."

Harry smiled lopsidedly. "At least zombies die from a headshot…"

"So inconsiderate," John agreed.

There was a beat.

"So what is the training regime Dr. Robert cooked up?" Harry asked.

"Well he basically gave me three options," said John. "He said, when it comes down to it, magic is about making things *more* . Since Dao-ga keeps magic to yourself, doing something that will make you… *better,* in a sense, would do the job. Now, I don't think you're interested in turning into a mental genius."

Harry shook his head frantically, which made John smirk.

"The other options are fitness and music," John said. "Since you're already learning violin, we can use that. But you'll have to really up the ante. I'm talking about getting good enough that people will pay you money to play on stage here."

Harry glanced to the side. Just thinking about the amount of practice he'd have put himself through to get that good at violin made him want to take a long nap.

"Yeah, I didn't think so," said John lightly. "You're more of a pleasure player, and there's nothing wrong with that. So that leaves fitness. Would you be interested in learning MMA?"

Harry perked up immediately. "Mixed-martial arts? Yeah, I would!"

"Okay, that's good," said John. "Robert and I agreed the physical fitness rout is probably our best option since we'll have to build you from ground-up, and that's a lot of room for improvement, which is exactly what we want… but it's going to be *really* tough because your foundation is bit shakier than others."

Harry pulled a face. "My EIA?"

"And other things," said John wryly. "We'll work around it. Robert recommended some potions. Hopefully they'll work better than albuterol."

Harry felt tentatively hopeful. Perhaps it was because he was a wizard, but asthma inhalers and Muggle medications just didn't work for him. It made him wonder if that was the reason why even Muggle-born witches and wizards opted to see a Healer rather than a Doctor.

"The other challenge is that I'll have to challenge you to the point you feel like your life is being threatened," said John grimly. "I don't want to give you PTSD; you know it's not fun."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"You know life and magic are intrinsically tied together, right?" said John. "The only way to improve is to go through challenging practice. So the question is, how do you challenge your life? One way is to threaten it. Apparently that's why Robert does parkour. And no," John added when Harry opened his mouth, "You're not learning parkour. It's too dangerous. Johns Hopkins has a betting pool on the day Baltimore city police will ring them up to report an idiot who busted his skull jumping from building to building, they'll look for Robert to do the operation, only to find the idiot was him."

Even so, Harry still felt like protesting. He'd wanted to learn Parkour ever since he'd seen Dr. Robert vault over battlements and leap from tower to tower two years ago. He could only imagine how much freedom and fun he'd experience.

"Don't even think about doing it on your own," said John sternly. "You can't even run a mile at this point."

"Yes, I can!" said Harry indignantly.

"Oh yeah?" said John, eyebrows raised. "We'll see about that. Let's race. Starting now."

They dashed. Harry was in the lead for the first two minutes or so,

but afterwards he had to slow down, and then completely stop because he was winded. In the meantime, John swiftly ran pass Harry and kept running at a brisk pace. *I can't even beat my mum*, Harry thought mortifyingly as he sucked in air.

John eventually turned around and jogged back to Harry.

"No parkour," she declared, arms crossed.

Harry raised a hand in surrender and reluctant agreement.

They headed back to Baker Street a few minutes later, shortly after Sherlock sent a text that said: *Return immediately. Benedict in deep distress. SH* . Harry and John grumbled Sherlock was probably exaggerating until they were about two streets away. Benedict was screaming so loudly, people around them were looking up to see where the noise was coming from.

"Oh, *f…* ," John hissed as they quickened their pace.

Benedict's cries reached a fever-pitch by the time John and Harry entered the flat. Sherlock, who looked very harassed, quickly shoved Benedict into John's chest, and that muffled his screaming somewhat. Everyone let out a sigh of relief when he eventually quieted down, suckling John's chest.

"Yep, I'm just the person who has the boob," John grumbled as she stretched her legs on the coffee table.

"A grand privilege," said Sherlock as collapsed into his customary seat by the fireplace.

There was a moment of quiet as everyone sagged into their seats. Then Harry's phone made a rooster's crow. Ron's face sprung up when Harry connected the call.

"Hey, Harry, John, Sherlock," said Ron. "Sorry, but we have a bit of a problem."

Harry was instantly filled with alarm.

"What?" Sherlock asked sharply.

Ron scratched the back of his head. "We just learned Umbridge is in charge of managing the Ministry-owned MMN."

Harry blinked at this. "Isn't that a good thing?" he asked.

"Eh, yes and no," said Ron. "She's so stupid the plan would work faster, in the long run, but right now that's a problem. Me and Mr. Jeremey were banking on the Ministry to go through a transition period before we handed the whole thing over. But Umbridge won't have any of it. She wants us to hand over everything *now* ."

Sherlock pursed his lips. "That won't leave you much time to launch the third attack."

"No," said Ron, shaking his head. "Mr. Jeremy's talking to Umbridge, but honestly, I don't think it will change things."

Sherlock clicked his tongue.

"The *idiot*," he growled. "How can someone this stupid even *exist* ?"

Inside the office of the Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, two people were at a standoff. Behind the desk sat Dolores Umbridge, and across from her sat Jeremy Shin, consultant to the Magical Mobile Network. There was a look of callous pleasure plastered all over Umbridge's face, whereas Jeremy looked as though he wished to tear it off with his teeth.

"Madam Umbridge," said Jeremy Shin. "I'm not advocating the MIT-S because I will have financial gain from it. I am stressing the importance of the service it provides in good conscience. It is the backbone of the MMN. Cutting it off would be disastrous."

"To you, perhaps," sniffed Umbridge. "Those who are proper witches and wizards do not need Muggle tricks."

"It's not a *trick*," said Jeremy between gritted teeth. "It's something only 1% of the Muggle population is capable of making."

"That means nothing in the Magic World," said Umbridge

dismissively. "I have wasted enough time talking about this. Good day."

She dismissed Jeremy with an imperious wave of hand. Jeremy glared at Umbridge for a moment before he jumped to his feet.

"On your head, then," he growled.

Then he turned and stormed out.

In the days that followed, most of the wizarding world didn't think much of the news that the British Ministry of Magic gained ownership of the Magical Mobile Network. They simply noted their phones still worked as it always did when Minister Cornelius Fudge made the announcement and then went on with their lives. Perhaps a few hundred noted the effective date of transfer was the last Monday of April.

The customers of the Magical Mobile Network eventually received written notices-by Owl-from the British Ministry of Magic about the transfer. The fliers promised better service and no scandalous footages from now on. Maybe half of those who actually took the time to read it took the promises seriously.

Then Effective Date of Transfer dawned. Hardly anyone noted the significance of the date during early morning hours. Customers merely went through their daily rituals, which for many people was taking out their phones to watch the Magical Mobile Network's televised news.

Except on that day, they realised their phone had stopped working.

"What the hell happened to the MMN?"

That was the first question Ron faced after he and Hermione settled in Hogwarts Express and waited for the rest of their friends to arrive. The person who asked it was Seamus Finnigan. He looked quite a bit irate as he brandished his MMN phone, which was completely

devoid of flames.

"Dunno," Ron answered. "The Ministry hasn't contacted me since they bought it two weeks ago."

"So they're not asking you for help?" asked Dean, who was with Seamus.

"No," said Ron, shaking his head. "I'm completely barred from the thing. I'm not that much help, anyway. Phone not working is a network problem, and only Miss Jack really knows the network."

Seamus swore horribly.

"How could the Ministry mess it up this badly?!" he roared. "They said it was a simple process! It's supposed to go without any hiccups!"

"Hell if I know," said Ron blandly. "Miss Jack set everything up so the whole thing is completely automated. There was literally nothing to do except answer customer's calls. All the ministry had to do was take everything *as is* ."

Seamus swore again.

"Do you think they can fix it?" asked Dean.

"Maybe. I don't know," said Ron, shrugging. "The Ministry'll probably try to get ahold of Miss Jack. I say good luck. She's been MIA since she left the country to see her fiancé."

"Ha, like she'd answer a call to work when she's on a holiday," scoffed Seamus. "I reckon I'm better off cancelling, but Mam thinks if I do, we won't get compensated, so she's sending Howlers every day instead. What do you think?"

"Cancel when the Ministry promises compensation for the lost service," said Ron. "Don't stick around. Who knows when it'll come back online? I'm not holding my breath, honestly."

Seamus and Dean left the compartment after this exchange. Hermione, who had been observing it from her seat looking quite

gratified, showed Ron the front page of the *Daily Prophet.* The headline article had a wizarding photograph of Fudge and Umbridge moving swiftly away to the edge, both looking shifty and harassed. Ron noted the slightly burnt quality of Umbridge's cardigan and hair with savage satisfaction.

"What did it say?" Ron asked after returning to his seat.

" 'The Ministry is looking into the matter and is trying to resolve the problem as quickly as possible,'" said Hermione. " 'We are not overlooking any possibility; be it Floo-network glitch to an old Magical Mobile Network employee sabotaging the network out of malice'."

Ron huffed. "Of course he'd try to blame us."

"Let him try," said Hermione sniffily. "I have all the documentation. We can even take him to court and win."

"Oh, yeah, about that," said Ron, a bit nervously. "Mr. Jeremy said I might actually have to go to court. When the, uh, Ministry continues to fails to fix the network. Can you go with me?"

Hermione looked flattered.

"Of course! What do I have to do?" she asked eagerly.

"What you usually do," said Ron breathlessly.

Final Notes : Still not done with Umbridge. Nope.

Catastrophe in the Ministry

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Seven: Catastrophe in the Ministry

Arthur Weasley paused for a moment as his tiny office trembled violently. The chorus of screaming and shouting voices reverberating through the floor told him it wasn't an earthquake that shook the Ministry of Magic from its foundations, but several hundred Howlers that exploded simultaneously. Before long Arthur smelled smoke, and as though on cue, he heard a multitude of footsteps hurrying down the halls.

It had become almost like a daily ritual now, Arthur mused. Ever since the Ministry took over the Magical Mobile Network, the service ceased to work. That led the customers to send increasingly vicious curses to lodge their complaints. No one in the Ministry even batted an eye at the incoming Howlers anymore, because they came so frequently at massive volumes (and often sent from disgruntled people within the Ministry).

Dolores Umbridge was the primary recipient of the angry mail, and Fudge a close second. Arthur knew for a fact the latter refused to leave his office since the public started screaming for his resignation for mishandling the MMN acquisition. Umbridge he didn't see, but rumour had it she practically moved residence to St. Mungo's because the enclosed curses often left her grossly transfigured

(amphibians were a popular choice; one enterprising soul turned her into a pink toad-slug hybrid, but the form quickly got lost in the avalanche of other curses, said Reggie Cattermole from Magical Maintenance). Even then, the collateral damage was so hefty, the Ministry decided to destroy any and all incoming mail addressed to Madam Umbridge unless it was a Howler, as preemptively destroying Howlers only made things worse.

For the most part, Arthur was more inclined to feel sorry for his Ministry colleagues. Since the shutdown, all hands in the Department of Magical Transportation were working hideous amounts of overtime to correct the problem. Unfortunately, only one person in the world truly understood how the MMN worked and she had gone missing (Arthur knew Ms. Shin could be contacted through a fabulous Muggle communication method called email, but no one asked and, though he knew the thing existed, he didn't know how it worked).

After two weeks of hair-pulling, the Floo Network Authority decided that they should rescue the phones' calling ability at the very least. This meant connecting the phones to the old Floo Network. However, the spell the Floo Network Authority used to connect fireplaces didn't work on mobile phones because the latter weren't fixtures. Someone eventually developed a modified version of the spell, but the magic required a phone to be within line of sight. So the Floo Network Authority sent out notices to the MMN customers-a lengthy and tedious process that required shifting through nine thousand rolls of parchment, according to Madam Edgecombe- that told them where they ought to go to get their phones fixed. Fudge fretted over what the avalanche of angry customers would do, so he ordered fifty members of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and even some Aurors to station on the sites to prevent a stampede or a riot.

A huge crowd showed up to the sites as expected. Only, no one wanted to get their phones fixed. Instead, everyone demanded compensation for the lost service *and* express their desire to cancel their old MMN service.

While Fudge and Umbridge tore at their hair in bafflement, Arthur knew exactly why this happened. Five days after the shutdown-at

which point the idea that service will not resume as usual in any foreseeable future would sink into the customers' heads, as his (brilliant) son Ron rightfully put it-the former and now deemed redundant employees of the Magical Mobile Network sprang into action. In various times, the thousands of dormant phones aired a short ad:

The advertisement opened with a view of a wizarding household listening to Minister Fudge's flustered assurances that the Ministry was addressing the mysterious shutdown of the Magical Mobile Network as quickly as possible. The young ones grumbled how the MMN was now more like the Ministry's Mangled Network as the parents held their unresponsive phones morosely. The next scene showed the parents sending off their children to Hogwarts at platform nine and three quarters. They worried how they were going to communicate as Hogwarts Express chugged away, and mentioned they no longer had an owl.

Then the mother's deactivated phone, which the camera often focused on, suddenly lit up. The parent pair stared at the phone in astonishment before the mother hastily placed the phone to her ear. The voice of the child who grumbled in the previous scene said: *Mum?*

"Darling, I can hear you," said the mother, tearing up. "But how…?"

"The original MMN maker opened a new telephone service called *Zing* !" said the child brightly. "And Mum, you won't believe this, but it's even *better* than the old MMN! It's only two Galleons a month and you don't have to use Floo powder at all!"

"Did you have to buy a new phone?" asked the father.

"No! We can keep the old phone! The switchover only took ten minutes! Isn't that *amazing* ?!"

"Why wait?" said a disembodied voice as the mother and father joyfully spoke to their children. "Respond now and get a service even better than the one you used to enjoy… no Floo, no hassle, and no Ministry meddling. If you are not satisfied, you may call us at any time and cancel. You will get your money back… *guaranteed* ."

Ron told Arthur almost fifty percent of the old MMN customers signed up for the new *Zing* service on the first day of the ad's airing. More customers flooded in as the word got out. By mid-May, Zing ® had (re)covered all of the old domestic users of the MMN and then some.

"I reckon things turned out for the better," Ron remarked. "The transition only took *two weeks* . We haven't got back all the international customers, of course, but it's only a matter of time."

This didn't mean things were all rosy at the home front. The Ministry was deeply in the red because of the MMN acquisition, but had nothing to show for it due to the massive cancelations. There were also rumors Fudge took out many private loans to finance the purchase and the lenders were absolutely irate because the promised investment returns had gone up in smoke. Then there was poor Percy, who probably under the Minister's orders, kept trying to get Arthur and Ron to help.

"Father, as Ministry employees we are both obligated to find a solution," Percy argued. "If you could just…"

"Percy, even if I knew how to fix the network, it's too late. Pretty much all of the customers are gone, and they aren't likely to come back," Arthur sighed.

Percy pounded a fist angrily on Arthur's desk.

"That's why we need to find Ms. Shin at once! The sale was done in bad faith, I just know it! It's obvious Ms. Shin took advantage of the Ministry to generate even greater profit!"

"You know Jeremy Shin was practically chasing Madam Umbridge down to convince her to agree to a transition process," said Arthur sternly. "Don't you think it would've made all the difference?"

"Perhaps, but just as possibly, the transition may have been a means to milk more money from the Ministry," Percy blustered as his ears turned pink. "Anyway, all this is water under the bridge. Right now we need to think how the Ministry can recuperate the losses. If we don't, the Ministry will have to scale down and maybe

even issue layoffs… this can mean your job may become redundant, Father!"

Arthur already had a strong inkling of this, but he wasn't worried. He might have been in the past, but now with Ron earning more in a month than Arthur did in an entire year, and Ron faithfully supporting the family, Arthur had no reason to be concerned. He would miss the Muggle artefacts, of course, but he had Lestrade and Sherlock to fill the gap. But he still winced as he thought about his Ministry colleagues and what massive job cuts would mean for them.

"See?" pressed Percy, mistaking the reason behind Arthur's wince. "You need to help, Father, this is very important! First and foremost we need to locate Ms. Shin so she can face charges-"

"What do you mean?" said Arthur sharply. "Are you saying the Wizengamot already decided Ms. Shin is criminally liable?"

Percy's face turned red as he looked away.

"She'll have a fair trial. It's not a given that she'll face jail time, and even then, it'll probably be just a few-"

" *Percy* !" Arthur roared, his temper finally getting the better of him. "Look at me in the eye and tell me the Ministry won't send Ms. Shin to Azkaban before the trial! Then look at me in the eye and tell me you can guarantee she'll *live* to see the trial!"

Percy wouldn't look up, but he looked stricken.

"Can you really live with that in your conscience?!" Arthur shouted.

Arthur didn't see Percy after this exchange. He had a feeling Percy was avoiding him.

Days passed. Kingsley Shacklebolt and Lestrade reported that Fudge stopped entertaining the idea of arresting Jacqueline. Arthur didn't know what led to this unusually wise decision. In his more hopeful moments, Arthur wondered if Percy convinced Fudge. Usually, though, Arthur thought Shin June Hu's decision to stop using his height-reduction spell must have had something to do with it. He certainly looked more terrifying at six feet plus than he did at

five feet five.

More days passed. As the month of May drew to a close, those belonging to the Department of Magical Transportation found their overtime hours dwindle to nothing. From the looks of it, apparently the Ministry had decided the MMN was a lost cause.

Those in the Ministry took this as an ominous sign. And sure enough, everyone received an interdepartmental memo from Minister Fudge, which said he had an important announcement…

Unlike the Ministry, Hogwarts more or less return to normal by the end of May. Students, teachers, headmasters and headmistress alike were poring over their phones and watching the enchanted televised news once more.

Ron Weasley was among those students enjoying the atmosphere of restoration. It certainly helped that he wasn't working for the Magical Mobile Network anymore. He never realised how much time he spent at the MMN until he no longer had to. Even now it felt almost indulgent to spend his evenings doing nothing but homework.

There was only one sliver of cloud covering the general sunniness of his mood.

"An egg," Ron grumbled light-heartedly. "Of all the things she could've used for the packaging, she uses an *Easter Egg* ."

To his left, one of his fellow Gryffindors let out an excited noise as a small, brightly-coloured egg popped out of the Floo chute of his phone. He eagerly cracked the egg open, and a cloud of lilac-coloured smoke soon engulfed the egg, followed by a localized explosion. When the smoke cleared, the egg was gone, and several vials of Weather In A Bottle and large bag of Canary Creams were on the table instead.

"I think it's more interesting than a regular brown box," said Hermione, in a teasingly scolding tone.

"But boxes have that unwrapping a present feeling," said Ron.

"So does Easter eggs," said Hermione. "Especially when your mother makes them; tell her I say thank you for the egg and toffee, by the way."

Ron was making a vague accenting noise when a lone barn owl swooped down towards Ron and dropped a letter on his plate.

"Gee, who uses owls in this day and age?" said Harry sarcastically.

"Must be someone from the Ministry," said Neville as Ron picked up the envelope, which had a wax seal that bore the Ministry of Magic's logo: a large M that an upright wand in the middle.

Ron tore open the envelope and read the letter. It was from Dolores Umbridge, writing in behalf of the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge. She proposed a meeting on the 27th and said it was to his best interest that he agreed.

Hermione, Harry and Neville read the letter over Ron's shoulder.

"Why do you think she wants to see you?" said Neville.

"Probably wants you to fix the network, somehow," said Hermione, sniffing. "I'm surprised she's actually *asking*, rather than take you to court."

Ron certainly didn't think Umbridge would take the route he *thought* she was taking. In any case, Umbridge must think he was a blithering idiot or a coward to think she could order him around.

"I sort of wish I can tell her she can go to hell," said Ron regretfully as Hermione wrote a terse note of agreement and sent it off.

Ron, Hermione Harry and Neville went over to the Hufflepuff table and had a brief discussion with Julia about the meeting. In the end they decided only Ron and Hermione should attend.

"It'll give her a false sense of security," said Hermione. "We *want* her to act as stupid as possible. She might put up her guard if Harry or Julia is there."

Ron received a follow-up letter from Umbridge on the twenty sixth. It

stated she was going to accompany the new head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, who was going to explain the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament to the champions at nine o' clock in the evening at the Quidditch field, so she expected Ron to be there as well.

Ron goggled for a brief moment after he finished reading Umbridge's letter. He had been so caught up in the Magical Mobile Network drama, he completely forgot about the *Triwizard Tournament* .

"I'll film it," said Harry, who looked as taken aback as Ron. "You don't have to be there."

At half past eight on the twenty-seventh, Harry, Ron and Hermione left the Gryffindor Tower and went downstairs. As they crossed the entrance hall, Cedric came up from the Hufflepuff common room.

"What d'you reckon it's going to be?" he asked as they went together down the stone steps, out into the cloudy night. "Fleur keeps going on about underground tunnels; she reckons we've got to find treasure."

"That wouldn't be too bad," said Ron, thinking that if he was a champion, he would simply ask Hagrid for a niffler to do the job for him.

The four of them walked down the dark lawn to the Quidditch stadium, turned through a gap in the stands, and walked out onto the field.

"What've they done to it?" Cedric said indignantly, stopping dead.

The Quidditch field was no longer smooth and flat. It looked as though somebody had been building long, low walls all over it that twisted and crisscrossed in every direction.

"They're hedges!" said Harry, bending to examine the nearest one.

"Hello there!" called a familiar voice.

Ron's brother Bill was waving at them from middle of the field.

Behind him, Ron could see a powerfully-built witch who had ash-blond dreadlocks standing between Krum and Fleur. He assumed the witch was the new head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports.

"What're you doing here?" said Ron as he, Cedric, Hermione and Harry climbed over the last hedge.

"I'm representing Gringotts," said Bill, looking a bit wry. "They want someone to complain to about the MMN debacle. Since the Ministry is out, that leaves you."

"It's not my fault the Ministry's defaulting on their private loans," Ron retorted.

"I know," said Bill. "And the goblins know that too. They actually respect you a lot for playing dirty so well."

"I didn't play dirty!" Ron protested.

"That's enough Mr. Weasley!" barked the witch. "The champions need informing!"

Cedric joined the other champions, while Ron, Bill and his friends hung back. Fleur Delacour, Ron noticed, was eyeing Bill with great interest. Apparently she had no objection whatsoever to long hair or earrings with fangs on them.

"I'm Gwendolyn Morgan, the new head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports," said the witch. "As you can see, we're modifying the field for the third task. Don't worry," she added sharply, after spotting the less than-happy expression on Cedric's face, "you'll have your Quidditch field back to normal once the task is over! Now, I imagine you can guess what we're making here?"

No one spoke for a moment. Then -

"Maze," grunted Krum.

"Correct," said Morgan. "A maze. The third task's very straightforward. The Triwizard Cup will be placed in the center of the maze. The first champion to touch it will receive full marks."

"We seemply 'ave to get through the maze?" said Fleur.

"There will be obstacles," said Morgan. "Hagrid is providing a number of creatures… then there will be spells that must be broken. You know the drill. Now, the champion who is leading on points will get a head start into the maze." She nodded at Cedric. "Then Mr. Krum will enter, and then Miss Delacour. But you'll all have a fighting chance, depending how well you get past the obstacles. It shouldn't be too bad."

Ron, who knew only too well the kind of creatures that Hagrid was likely to provide for an event like this, thought the task was going to be as bad as it could get.

The champions nodded politely. Then everyone began to wend their way out of the growing maze. Ron was going to follow, but then Morgan tapped him on the shoulder.

"You're Ronald Weasley?"

"Uh, yeah," Ron said, slightly surprised.

"Madam Umbridge will arrive in a minute," said Morgan, giving Ron a sceptical look. "Wait here."

"Okay," said Ron.

Bill grinned slightly.

"I'll wait with you," he said. "I want to have a word with her, too."

Gwendolyn Morgan let out a snort and then went away.

Ron, Hermione and Bill waited in the middle of the field. Ron was thinking it was bad choice for a place to hold a private meeting, when there was small pop, and a squat little witch holding a tea kettle appeared out of thin air.

Ron couldn't help but let out a gasp of horror when his eyes landed on the witch, who turned out to be Umbridge. Though essentially recognisable, much of her appearance had changed and for the worse. Her hair was burnt down almost to the scalp and sported

several bald patches. Several slimy and grotesque-looking tentacles were protruding out her skull, where patches were. The pink cardigan and matching robes hid most her body, but her exposed face sported skin that looked extremely flabby, like she'd gained tremendous amounts of weight in a short period of time and then lost much of it just as quickly. It also had a distinct greenish-brown shade and a shiny, yet porous texture, like that of warty toad.

"Good Evening, Mr.-" Umbridge began, her voice a raspy croak, and not her usual high-pitch tone.

Umbridge cleared her throat ("herm, herm") before continuing:

"Mr. Ronald Weasley, I've been meaning to see you for some time," said Umbridge. She still sounded raspy, but her pitch was higher.

"Really," said Ron skeptically. "That's funny, because the last time I tried to talk to you, you said no."

"Ah, well, the Ministry was busy at the time," said Umbridge evasively. "It still is, as a matter of fact. I assume your father has told you?"

Ron shrugged. Umbridge looked like she wanted him to say something or else slap him, but Ron didn't oblige. So she went on:

"Yes, we have been very busy… I have to admit we are teensy bit over our heads. A bit of help would not go amiss."

She was getting close to the point, Ron thought, as Hermione unnecessarily stepped on his foot to shush him. At length, Umbridge made an explosive sound through her wide nostrils.

"Can you help us, Mr. Weasley?" she burst out.

"What kind of help do you want?" asked Ron. "I can't fix the thing for you."

"Yes, I know that!" snapped Umbridge, her voice rising to a shriek. "I also know the Ministry far beyond the point of recovery! But even if you don't know how to fix it yourself, you surely know people who can! Don't you?!"

"Yeah, sure," said Ron.

Umbridge seemed to collapse a little at that.

"That's all the Ministry needs!" she cried. "Please take over the Magical Mobile Network! We believe you are the only person who can rescue it from ruin!"

Ron stared at her.

"You want me to buy it," he said.

"Yes," said Umbridge eagerly. "The Ministry, of course, knows we are in no position to ask you buy it back at its original price. We would be quite content for half or even forty-"

"No deal," Ron interrupted. "Three million Galleons is way too expensive for an underwater company that's got no equity or tangibles."

Umbridge shot an ugly look of hatred at Ron before composing herself.

"Well, we can certainly negotiate," said Umbridge stiffly. "What is your offer?"

Ron dreamed of this moment. It felt just as good as his fantasies when he declared:

"Zero."

Umbridge looked gratifyingly aghast. Ron savored the look.

"Zero, Mr. Weasley?" she stammered. "Are you telling me you consider the company you poured so much of your blood, sweat and tears to build up is now worth nothing to you?"

"Yes," said Ron. "Whatever it was worth before, it's worth nothing now. Actually, it's worth less than nothing: no income, but a lot of expenses. Even if that wasn't a problem, the company's reputation is shot. Do you know what people call it these days? The Ministry's Mangled Network. No matter how I look at it, it's a poison asset."

Ron stood back and crossed his arms.

"The Ministry ought to pay *me* to take over the thing," he said. "But my brother works for you lot, so I won't. Anyway: zero. Take it or leave it."

For a while Umbridge just stared at Ron, breathing deeply and a bit erratically, like a steam engine going overdrive. Before long, she exploded:

"THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT!" she screamed. "THIS NEVER SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED! YOU KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN, DIDN'T YOU?!"

Ron shrugged again.

"DON'T YOU DARE SHRUG AT ME, YOU LITTLE BEAST!" Umbridge shrieked. "I'M STILL THE HIGH INQUISITOR OF HOGWARTS! LET'S SEE IF YOU'LL FEEL SO SMUG WHEN I-"

Bill whipped out his wand before Ron could move.

"I'd be careful, ma'am," he said calmly. "Ron's my brother and I won't hesitate to defend him. Just so you know, I'm a senior curse breaker at Gringotts."

Umbridge stared at Bill's wand and thought better of it.

"I'll take you to court!" shouted Umbridge furiously. "The Wizengamot will never acquit you!"

"By all means take us to court," said Hermione, looking contemptuously at Umbridge. "The case against us will never stand. We have the documents you yourself signed for the acquisition. By signing it, you put yourself-and as the representative, the entire Ministry of Magic-under a binding magical contract that absolved us from any and all obligation to MMN in exchange for our rights to it."

Umbridge let out a pathetic mewling noise.

"It's all on you, now," said Hermione relentlessly. "Just the way you wanted. But I suppose it really is too much for you. Well, if you want

help, then I suggest that you go and hire a Muggle who can do it for you. They'll probably do a much better job. Let's go Ron."

"Yeah," said Ron.

Then turning their backs on Umbridge, Ron and Hermione strode back towards the castle.

Final Notes :… and I'm still not done with Umbridge. Nuh-uh.

Sorry for the delay, dear readers. Besides Christmas, the New Years, the overwhelming pain of crafting an ad (see above), I had difficulty accessing my FFNET account (either I couldn't log in or the publish function didn't work… ugh!).

Gwendolyn Morgan played Quidditch for the Holyhead Harpies and was the team Captain in 1953, according to *Quidditch Through the Ages* .

I had to think how many people the Ministry of Magic employs for this chapter. The Ministry spared 500 workers for an entire year for the Quidditch World cup and could still function. It also has a ten story building they fill with workers, presumably. I roughly estimated the number of persons to be around 800-1000… 900 being my best guess.

I bought a bicycle. If I stop updating this story for months on end without finishing, it probably means I got killed riding it. I'm trying to come up with a Disaster Recovery Plan, but so far nothing. Oh well.

How To Catch A Dark Lord

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Eight: How To Catch A Dark Lord

Harry and his friends sneaked into the Room of Requirement after Ron and Hermione returned from their meeting with Umbridge. Ginny joined them this time, as she didn't have a date with Michael Corner on that particular night.

"I told him I was busy today, with exams and such. That made him upset. Seriously, are guys supposed to be this *clingy* ?" Ginny complained to Hermione as they waited for Sherlock to appear.

Harry didn't pay attention to Hermione's reply and cocked an eyebrow at Julia, who smiled wryly and shrugged her shoulders in return. Apparently she, as a girl, didn't get this dating business either.

Sherlock eventually showed up on the mirror. Ron and Hermione wasted no time telling him about Umbridge: how she was completely over her head in regards to the Magical Mobile Network and now was desperate enough to ask them for help… how in the end she threatened to take them to court, though she had no hope to win the case…

"The only way to get help now is to twist Miss Jack's arm," said Ron

with relish. "I doubt they'd find her, though."

"Wrong," said Sherlock. "Fudge *did* figure out she was hiding in the States and tried to bring her back via extradition and later subterfuge. The Americans, of course, were not amused."

"So she's safe?" asked Hermione.

"As safe as a naturalized citizen of the US can be in British soil," said Sherlock gravely. "That may not mean much if or when she returns to England."

"WHAT D'YOU MEAN?" Julia shouted furiously, startling everyone. "Wasn't the point of marrying her off keeping her out of the country, where it's dangerous?!"

"Our purpose is destroying *Voldemort*," said Sherlock sternly. "Not marrying off Jacqueline, not making a killing with Zing ®, and certainly not bankrupting the Ministry of Magic, as vindictive as it was. The latter in particular did us little good."

" *Why* ?" demanded Julia, arms crossed.

"LV can replace key members of the Ministry of Magic with his Death Eaters while it's in turmoil," said Sherlock. "This, more than the acquisition of the MMN, would facilitate LV in achieving his preliminary goal of becoming the Wizarding World's overlord. I doubt this didn't cross his mind. In fact, that the Floo Network Authority was able to come up with a solution that corrected the MMN's telephony problems in two short weeks seems to suggest LV is using the opportunity for all its worth."

For a while no one spoke, they were so shocked. Never in his wildest dreams did Harry think Lord Voldemort would *want* the MMN purchase to fail. At least, think it was of no consequence to him ultimately. Not for the first time, Harry marveled at the depths of Sherlock's genius and quietly despaired of ever being as good.

Then a thought occurred to him.

"… And if he was upset about the way the MMN turned out," said Harry slowly, "I would've dreamt about it."

"Exactly," said Sherlock, nodding once. "I assume you didn't have any visions lately. Chances are he anticipated this outcome and prepared for it… all without telling his followers. Of course, why would he care if his followers are put in the penury when it would make them more dependent on him? And why would he care about their financial support when he can get his hands on the Ministry's tax revenue?"

Everyone nodded grimly. Julia took several deep breaths before putting a very forbidding expression.

"So you- *we* - need to smooth things over?" she asked, her arms still tightly crossed. "Before my Dad makes the underhanded deal public and throw all the participating Death Easters in Azkaban?"

"Obviously," said Sherlock, smirking a bit before turning serious. "The original plan was to have your Uncle Jeremy acting as the on-site coordinator at the Ministry after the purchase. He would've 'saved the day', as it were, once the majority of the customers transitioned to Zing ®. I never intended Jacqueline to leave America until the dust settled, but Umbridge's stupidity made things go too fast, too deep, too soon."

Julia sighed deeply. "Well I can't blame you for Umbridge. So what happens now?"

"Jacqueline will announce her attention to salvage the mess and partially refund the Ministry for goodness sake," said Sherlock. "Our hope is that she will be able to do so remotely. Afterwards, Lestrade will reveal Fudge's underhand deal to Madam Bones. Not ideal, but it'll do."

"Figures things wouldn't be straightforward," said Ron after Sherlock adjourned the meeting, and as they tiptoed back to the Gryffindor tower (Julia flew back to the Hufflepuff common room through an open window riding her broomstick). "No regrets on selling the MMN off, though. It did Miss Jack a load of good."

"How do you know?" asked Neville.

"Fred and George are visiting her right now," said Ginny. "I don't

know if we should thank her husband for this, but they just told us she looked like she actually *gained weight*…"

On the other side of the Atlantic, Fred and George Weasley were inside a sizeable house in the suburbs of USA. At the moment, they were both sitting on wooden stools at a marble-top kitchen island and had just finished telling Ron and Ginny via text that there was a definite healthy tinge on both of Jacqueline Shin's cheeks and they didn't look sunken. After putting their phones away, they stared at their surroundings with great interest.

"Didn't think you'd opt for a Muggle kitchen, Miss Jack," said Fred as he beamed goofily at the shiny two-door fridge.

"Neither of us knows how to cook magically," said Jacqueline, their host, who was taking out an electric kettle. "You two can poke around, if you like."

As soon as she said this, Fred and George eagerly jumped off their stools and started opening cabinet doors.

"What is all this?" asked George as he pointed at a cabinet filled top to bottom with tins and boxes of tea, only one of which declared it had 'English Breakfast'.

"Tea," said Jacqueline as she shook her head. "Robert tried to stock up on tea before I moved in. Only, he didn't know what to get, so he got a bit of everything. Americans have funny ideas about tea-the more exotic and oddly flavored the better, from what I can tell."

"Can we try this one?" asked Fred, holding a box of rooibos tea aloft.

"If you like," said Jacqueline, looking dubious.

Soon the kitchen started to smell like a mixture of grandpa's pipe and cough medicine as Jacqueline poured hot water over teabags of rooibos.

"So how is the joke shop going?" Jacqueline asked as she pushed

the mugs across the kitchen island.

Identical grins spread across Fred and George's faces.

"Booming," said Fred happily. "Far better than we hoped for. The orders are coming in droves… our phones are seriously ringing out our pockets!"

"That's wonderful," said Jacqueline warmly. "I always thought you two had the knack as entrepreneurs."

"Thanks, but couldn't have done it without you, Miss Jack," said George, beaming. "We never would've had the shop up and running this quickly on our own."

"You would've got there eventually, with or without my help," Jacqueline demurred. "Glad I could help nevertheless. How is your mother taking it?"

"Haven't told her yet, but with the Ministry as it is right now, I think she'll be fine about us not working there," said Fred. "In fact, I think she'd even be okay about us leaving Hogwarts early."

Jacqueline made a thoughtful noise.

"What about the instant delivery?" she asked. "How is that working for you?"

"Fine," said Fred, "For the most part. I mean, we had a few people complain to us for being late or sending the wrong thing. Usually it's our fault, but sometimes it's not."

"Not?" asked Jacqueline. "How?"

"Sometimes students prank each other," George explained. "Pretend a package is from us, when it's from them. So the person is expecting one thing, except the egg has something else, and it blows up on them."

"Spoofing," said Jacqueline, nodding grimly. "I expected this to happen. How frequent?"

"Mmm, pretty often lately," said George thoughtfully. "I can't think of the number off the top of my head. About five times this week. What d'you think, Fred?"

"Sounds about right," said Fred. "It's usually not that hard to figure out who actually sent the package. *Zing* shows you the real name of the sender, even if you use someone else's phone or register as someone else."

Jacqueline regarded the two pensively.

"If I challenged you two to find a way to send a crate of dungbombs to, say, Mr. Filch's phone," she asked slowly, "without anyone including Dumbledore the wiser, do you think you can do it?"

"Sure, just give us a week," said Fred confidently. "I always wanted to try that. Why d'you ask?"

Jacqueline set her teacup aside and clasped her hands.

"I want you two to break Zing," she declared.

There was a moment of stunned silence.

"Why?" asked Fred, looking aghast.

"To stop people from actually breaking it," Jacqueline replied. "Users are already doing it, as you well know. It's only a matter of time before the problem goes out of hand. I'm willing to pay top dollar for someone who can find ways to exploit Zing faster than anyone else."

"How much?" asked George, and then almost fell off his stool when Jacqueline named the figure.

"That's how important I think it is," said Jacqueline calmly while the twins gibbered incoherently. "I don't have any official requirements yet, and you two will be more like interns at this point, but I recommend getting an N.E.W.T. in Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Did you talk to mum about this beforehand?" asked Fred, eyes narrowing.

"Maybe," said Jacqueline, briefly looking mischievous before sobering. "One of the reasons why I didn't push the instant delivery service earlier was because I couldn't find a way to authenticate phone users and create trustworthy connections. Even with that, people are finding ways around it. The pranks are harmless enough at the moment, but I can't rule out the possibility You-Know-Who may use Zing for something far more sinister, especially now."

The twins nodded.

"Why not hire someone like, I dunno, Alastor Moody?" asked George. "I mean, we'd love to do it, but he already *knows*, you know?"

"I've already hired him," said Jacqueline, sounding rueful. "His Auror experience really is invaluable, and not many people can think after the thoughts of dark wizards as well as he does. Only sometimes- all the time, really- he doesn't know when to *stop* ."

Jacqueline took out her magical mobile phone and clicked the home button. A holograph showing Alastor Moody and Jeremy Shin projected out from the screen. The holographic Moody was examining a small parcel with his magic eye, and the holographic Jeremy was glaring at Moody with his arms crossed. Boxes upon boxes were heaped in piles all around them.

" *Looks* like a chocolate frog," growled Moody, while eyeing the parcel he was holding suspiciously. "But I can't rule out someone putting poison in it… could've put a sleeping spell in the box and then jinxed the frog to attack the recipient while they're asleep… It'll take me about a week to be sure…"

Jeremy threw his hands up.

"MOODY! WE ACTUALLY HAVE TO *SEND* THESE PARCELS AT SOME POINT, YOU KNOW?!" he roared.

"… See what I mean?" Jacqueline sighed.

During the month of June, things were seemingly quiet in the

wizarding world. John had a suspicion Magical UK was so tired of embarrassing itself to the wizarding world at large, that the citizens did their best to give the appearance that all was back to normal.

As planned, Jacqueline 'fixed' the old Magical Mobile Network and partially refunded the Ministry of Magic the Galleons she received for its sale. Many members of the Ministry, who were on the verge of being made redundant, received the news with great gladness. Lestrade said they even threw a ruckus party for her, they were so grateful, but Jacqueline declined to attend. She rather liked living in America, she wrote in her RSVP, and had no intention of leaving it just now. John later asked her if she was serious, and Jacqueline replied yes, she was, thank you. Oh, by the way, no one tried to send a bomb through Zing just yet.

Fudge continued to act as Minister for Magic, even after Madam Bones, the head of the Department Magical Law Enforcement, somberly announced that several high-ranking Ministry officials, who she left unnamed, were convicted of bribery, embezzlement and illicit business practices. Arthur assured John and Sherlock that Fudge had been successfully impeached, and would leave the Minister's office after the Triwizard Tournament. So far so good, John thought, until Arthur told them Lucius Malfoy was not among those who were prosecuted for their hand in the MMN purchase, as he was too sensible to squander his own capital on a risky business venture. He was, however, heavily fined for enticing *other* people to invest in the MMN acquisition in exchange for kickbacks.

Dolores Umbridge vanished from the face of the earth. No one seemed to know what happened to her- at least Arthur, Kingsley and Lestrade didn't know anyone who knew- but Shin, who could hear the thoughts of anyone close by, told Lestrade both Madam Bones and Chief Auror Rufus Scrimgeour were aware of the fact she used the Imperius curse on Jacqueline and fed Hagrid veritaserum. Since the former act was illegal enough to earn someone a life sentence in Azkaban, Lestrade speculated the Wizengamot, which reinstated Dumbledore as chief, did something about it.

But that was it. The person Sherlock rattled the entire Wizarding World to flush out, Lord Voldemort, remained in the shadows and refused to react. It was as though he didn't care all but five of his

Death Eaters were in prison, and the two people who could do something for him-Snape and Lucius Malfoy-had their hands tied because of the MMN scandal. To top it off, Harry reported no visions or strange dreams.

"Not even one?" asked Sherlock impatiently.

"I did have a funny dream where I walked down a dark corridor that ended at a door," said Harry. "I really wanted the door to open, but it didn't, so I kept staring at the door."

"When did you have it?" asked John.

"The night before Ron got a letter from Percy," said Harry, his eyebrows furrowed. "That's the day before the *Daily Prophet* wrote that article about Hagrid."

"Did you have the dream again?" asked John.

"No," said Harry, shaking his head, "Just that one time."

Harry, of course, worried himself sick over LV's lack of activity. John sensed something else was bothering him, though, because Harry frequently bemoaned that even if Lord Voldemort were doing something, he'd be too blind and stupid to pick up the hint.

"Don't say that," said John sharply. "You're far from blind and stupid."

"That doesn't mean I'm smart *enough* !" Harry snarled. "I might miss something really important again!"

"Or you might pick up something everyone else missed, like the last time," said John, as she wondered if Harry still felt guilty over Winky.

Harry pulled a face and said nothing.

"Brains aren't everything, you know," John went on, "even for detectives. I don't remember what brought it up, but Sherlock and I talked about his deduction and observation skills once-what made him discover it and develop it, that sort of thing."

"Mensa society," said Sherlock. "That society for people who have high IQ, which I am not member."

"Oh, yeah, right, I asked if you'd join," said John.

"Pointless," Sherlock scoffed. "If raw intelligence and intelligence alone accounts for a person's ability to observe and deduce, then every single member of that society would be a great detective. At any rate, my abilities are largely the result of systematic training."

"Though your French grandmother might've contributed some relevant DNA," John retorted. "Anyway, I read a book that said after a certain point, greater intelligence has diminishing returns. Meaning you don't need to be a *genius*, in the popular definition of the word, to master something well enough to be brilliant at it. Good old fashion hard work and practice can get you there just fine. Can you guess what the book said how long it generally takes to master something?"

Harry gaped a little. "No, how long?"

"10,000 hours," said John. "That's about ten years. Sherlock's been practicing deduction since he was a *six*, meaning he has more than thirty thousand hours of practice under his belt. So of course he knows how to be a great detective."

That seemed to assuage Harry of whatever that was upsetting him, because he started to worry about nothing but Voldemort's inactivity afterwards.

Messages and calls from Harry dwindled to nothing as his final exams drew near. Even Sherlock, who was untiring and indefatigable when it came to his cases, started to find other things to put his mind on.

Then one day in late June, Sherlock had so far relaxed as to go for a walk with John in the Park, where the elms were lush with green and the sticky spear-heads of the chestnuts were bursting with their five-fold leaves. After leaving Benedict in Mrs. Hudson's hands, for two hours they rambled about together, in silence for the most part, as befits two people who know each other intimately. It was nearly five

before they were back in Baker Street once more.

John was expecting the first thing they'd hear was the sound of Benedict screaming. Instead John's phone mooed like a cow. John blinked in astonishment and Sherlock looked just as surprised. But the text that triggered the sound made both Sherlock and John's jaws drop:

I admit you were right about the cardio. SS

"… *What the f-, Snape* ?!" John shouted while Sherlock snatched the phone away. "Are you dying?! Are you *dead* !? Answer me dammit!"

Sherlock replied to the text within seconds. Instead of Snape, they got a text from Albus Dumbledore.

I would greatly appreciate if you met me and June Hu at his office in King's College. AD

Final Notes : Obviously the new bike hasn't killed me yet ;) Two weeks after the purchase, I concluded hour-long bike rides are quite fun, but arranging and defusing coups in HP-fanfic not so much, alas.

Jacqueline has not been exposed to enough Americans to properly know what they think about tea. She hasn't had sweet tea yet, but Robert will get her some eventually… after all, Maryland is technically a southern state (BOC is shot).

The book John was talking about is: *Outliers; The story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell. In case you forgot-and I don't blame you if you did-the ringtone John set for Snape is a lowing cow sound.

As posted in my profile page, I will be studying and preparing for a job-related certification exam until February. Unlike the masters' thesis, I need to sit down and learn stuff I don't know much about for it. :(

Unspoken Truth

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Seventy Nine: Unspoken Truth

The address Dumbledore texted to John and Sherlock was close to Waterloo station. Sherlock insisted on taking the cab until John pointed out they'd have to put Benedict in a car seat. Thus the three of them took the tube. Benedict giggled in delight whenever the train passed through a tunnel, which drew smiles from their fellow passengers. Sherlock, on the other hand, sulked through the entire trip.

Albus Dumbledore and Shin June Hu were waiting for them in the latter's windowless office. Dumbledore presented a familiar sight, in his paper-thin Muggle disguise. Mr. Shin, on the other hand, looked a bit altered. His normally white hair was black, and there were not as many wrinkles on his ancient face. Said face held an expression, namely a heavy scowl, which he directed at Benedict squirming inside his sling.

"You brought your baby with you?" he growled.

"You're starting to sound like your son-in-law," Sherlock complained.

"I wanted to show him my alma mater," said John as she patted Benedict's back. "Speaking of which, don't you teach at Queen's?"

"I teach at both," said Mr. Shin, still scowling. "The duplication spell has its uses."

"Won't people notice there are two of you?"

"Not when he registered himself as his own son here," said Sherlock, looking pointedly at Mr. Shin's hair. Then he demanded: "Are we talking to the real you, or are you a clone?"

Mr. Shin flicked a hand. The small glass cabinet in the corner flew open and the ceramic tea set inside bobbled over to the desk. Mr. Shin did another horizontal hand-flick and the teapot started steaming.

"Right. Doppelgangers can't do magic," John muttered as Mr. Shin poured the tea. "So why'd you call us here? And what's up with Snape? He's not dead, is he?"

"He is alive," said Dumbledore.

"Is he in danger, then?"

"He'll be fine," said Shin. "You three, on the other hand, are not."

Sherlock's eyes glittered. "We're in danger and you're afraid of the threat. What is it?"

"Guns," said Dumbledore simply.

John blinked a few times. "Sorry?"

"You heard him correctly, Dr. Watson," said Mr. Shin quietly.

"But wizards don't use guns," John protested. "They probably don't even know what they are!"

"Unless you're Moran," said Sherlock in a low voice.

"Exactly," said Dumbledore, nodding grimly. "Severus sent me the same enigmatic text message you no doubt received, John, after being summoned to Lord Voldemort not that long ago. Based on the sheer unlikelihood of Severus ever admitting that he is wrong, I

guessed either he or some other person received assassination orders. The next question, of course, is who and when? Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of time to speculate."

Sherlock nodded curtly. "LV is not a man who lets the grass grow under his feet."

"Again, exactly," said Dumbledore.

"Still, why guns?" said Sherlock. "There are easier ways to murder us. John, I would poison. Sloppy eater. Dead easy. I've given her chemicals and compounds that way and she's never even noticed. Missed an entire Wednesday once, didn't have a clue. Lestrade's so easy to kill it's a miracle nobody's succumbed to the temptation."

"Sherlock," John murmured as Dumbledore placed a restraining hand on Mr. Shin, who looked like he battling the temptation to murder Sherlock personally.

"Because the main concern isn't who Lord Voldemort would want dead," Dumbledore replied. "It is the kind of effect he wants to achieve through the assassination."

"So you suppose he wants to demoralize Harry without Mycroft knowing?" asked John worriedly. "Does LV know about Sherlock?"

"I have done my best to hide his importance to our side from Voldemort," said Dumbledore calmly. "It was, fortunately, quite easy to do. The interesting aspect about being me is that whenever Lord Voldemort notices his enemies are being clever, he assumes I am the mastermind behind it."

Sherlock smirked.

"But doesn't that mean you're probably the target?" asked John. "Not to be morbid, but I can see why LV may opt to use a sniper to kill you. Sherlock did a thorough test on magic shield verses guns, and guns won hands-down almost all the time."

"Thank you for confirming my suspicions, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Shin, as he sent a glare to Dumbledore. "I've told him guns have killed more wizards than spells ever did even in my day and their

killing power has only increased since then."

"You actually worry me with your ability to obtain the necessary firearms to conduct these experiments in the UK," said Dumbledore. "I assume Sirius volunteered to help?"

"Yeah," said John. "Remus helped, too."

"Dear me, he's turning into quite the risk-taker since he received the cure," Dumbledore remarked.

"I guess," said John. "But going back on topic, aren't you taking an unnecessary risk, coming here?"

"I argue that I'm mitigating the risk," said Dumbledore. "It is not a set thing that I am the target. Voldemort can just as easily select you two. All things considered, your deaths would have an even more profound effect on Harry."

"What about Hogwarts?" Sherlock asked. "Just as easily I can argue Harry is a possible target. Who is going to take care of him while you're here?"

"The duplication spell," said Dumbledore calmly. "Not to be boastful, but my mere presence is often quite a good deterrent; doubly so when June Hu is there also."

"But if LV himself were to infiltrate Hogwarts…"

"It is a possibility," Dumbledore agreed. "Thankfully, the final task of the Triwizard Tournament takes place tonight, and the Ministry is more determined than ever to ensure the security at Hogwarts is impeccable. Jacqueline has shut down every mobile phone connection that is present in Hogwarts, and I have placed a few finishing touches myself."

"Lestrade is there as a visitor?" John asked.

"He is," said Mr. Shin. "I am there also, seemingly, with the rest of my family and the Weaselys as my guest."

John let out a long sigh. Sherlock, on the other hand, frowned.

"The threat against you still remains," he pointed out.

"So it is," said Dumbledore calmly. "And so be it. I am quite willing to take the risk as well as the cost. If the choice must be between me and you two, I would much rather it be me because at this point the Wizarding World needs Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson more than Albus Dumbledore."

John stared at Dumbledore, shocked. Shin shifted his glance downwards and looked as though he aged a decade. Sherlock remained expressionless.

"Why do you say that?" John whispered.

"Because Sherlock knows everything that needs to be known," said Dumbledore, looking intently over his half-moon glasses. "You figured out, didn't you, Sherlock? I would expect nothing less from you."

Sherlock nodded once.

"Look at this," said Amos Diggory. "Just look at this, Ced! There's the Minister of Magic, Madam Bones, the Grandmaster… Every single top ranking official in the Ministry is here… all to see you!"

Cedric grimaced and didn't reply as Mr. Diggory stared avidly at the stands peeking over the edge of the twelve-foot-high hedge that ran all the way around the edge of the Quidditch field.

"The Prophet will have to eat their words now," said Mr. Diggory gloatingly. "Just you wait… Harry Potter's got nothing on you, Ced! I'm sure he agrees."

Harry, who was recording everything on camera, shrugged non-committedly.

"Why the long face?" said Mr. Diggory, now turning to his son. "Aren't you excited? Your future is so bright I can barely stand to look at it! I wouldn't be surprised if-"

"Dad, shut up!" Cedric suddenly burst out. "This isn't about me at all!"

Mr. Diggory stared at his son in astonishment. So did Harry.

There was an awkward pause.

"Nerves," said Mr. Diggory at length, smiling once more. "Must be the nerves. Don't worry Ced, you'll do fine… you're already in the lead, aren't you?"

Cedric let out a frustrated sigh as Mr. Diggory patted him on his shoulder. He said nothing as his father gave him one more encouraging word before he headed over to the Quidditch stands.

A heavy silence fell between the two remaining Hogwarts students.

"You think he's back, don't you?" said Cedric abruptly. "You-Know-Who."

Harry stared at him for a moment, feeling equal parts astonished and wary. He was so used to people trying to argue against the validity of the LV resurrection film, he assumed no one believed in the possibility. Cedric's question therefore was completely out of the blue to Harry, and he wasn't sure why he was asking.

In the end Harry nodded. Cedric let out a shaky breath.

"You're probably right," he muttered. "You have a knack of noticing things, Harry… stuff most people just ignore."

"I try," Harry murmured, as he still wondered why Cedric was bringing this up, now of all times.

There was another heavy silence.

"What's the point in this?" said Cedric, waving a hand at the maze's entrance, looking as though he couldn't digest the absurdity of the current situation. "Why are we playing around with games when You-Know-Who is back?"

Harry didn't reply, but looked down. He felt inexplicably guilty.

"Do you have a plan?" Cedric asked. "I can't imagine you not having one."

"Errr…" Harry stuttered.

"I want to help," said Cedric, looking determined. "I've still got a year left of school. Dumbledore will probably make you prefect… I'll be shocked if you don't get picked. You can tell me what needs to be done after the prefect meetings or at the prefect's bathroom. Just let me know. And I'll definitely help when you rally the troops."

Harry and Cedric looked at each other for a moment.

"… Okay," said Harry at length. "I'm warning you, though. I didn't even think about making an army until you brought it up. I wouldn't bank on me being prefect, either. My marks were miserable this year."

"At least you're thinking about it now," said Cedric, grinning. "And I'm sure Dumbledore will make an exception for you."

Harry shuddered. "I hope not."

There was another bout of silence.

"You should've been champion," said Cedric seriously. "The goblet would've picked you if there wasn't an age limit… would you have entered?"

Harry shook his head. "Spotlight isn't my thing."

Cedric grinned ruefully.

"No, I guess not…"

"LV is obsessed with killing Harry," Sherlock started. "His obsession predates his first murder attempt. He said as much when Harry was first year: *he only killed my mother because she tried to stop him from killing me* ."

Dumbledore nodded.

"The question to ask then is what triggered the obsession," Sherlock continued. "LV wouldn't have thought to personally murder a baby without good reason. Lupin said Death Eaters outnumbered the Order of the Phoenix members twenty to one and Order members were being picked off one by one thirteen years ago. Pettigrew presumably had a great deal to do with the escalation in the slaughter."

"To my regret," Dumbledore confirmed.

"Water under the bridge," said Sherlock dismissively. "Either way, he was working hard to achieve victory. Under such circumstances, what would make him think it would be profitable for him to drop everything and seek out a one year old baby? Revenge? Warning? Prophecy foretelling his Doom? What?"

John looked Sherlock, at Dumbledore and back again.

"Didn't I say that three years ago at the bowling alley?" asked John.

"You did. Dumbledore answered: 'You've actually mentioned the main reason, John.' He also said: Only the most powerful witches and wizards received his personal attention, which raises the question why he considered personally killing three children that year."

John blinked for a few times.

"It wasn't revenge," Sherlock went on. "Harry didn't exist long enough to do something that would warrant it. It wasn't a warning either, for the same reasons. That leaves…"

"… Prophecy foretelling his doom?" John exclaimed. "Bloody hell, I was only joking… !"

Sherlock smirked briefly before continuing:

"LV came across a prophecy that foretold his doom. How he came across the prophecy doesn't matter. He believed it and tried to counteract it. To his great regret, he ended up partially fulfilling the

prophecy when he attempted to murder Harry. It took him over a decade to overcome his mistake. Even then something went wrong- the blood he took, it wasn't the right type."

"And he feels it," said Dumbledore, nodding, "Every passing day he feels the blood, inadvertently but nevertheless willingly given, working against him."

Sherlock nodded back. "It's almost natural for someone in his position to wonder what kind of 'special' powers does Harry possess and wonder if there is a way to overcome it. He may even wonder if the prophecy he heard only secondhand would give him a clue as to how he could destroy his hated enemy. He certainly tried to get his hands on it once. Late April, wasn't it?"

"Correct," said Mr. Shin. "My spells managed to keep him out, for now."

There was a pause.

"So who were the other two kids he tried to kill?" John asked. "What did the prophecy say? Dr. Shin, you said the Department of Mysteries keeps track of all prophecies. Can you-"

"If he wanted to tell us, he would've told us long ago, I think," Sherlock snapped. "And don't even bother asking Dumbledore. He doesn't want to tell us outright. Anyway, it's not that hard to figure out. Prophecies always involve individuals and have a date component that limits the margin of error to a very small window. The last prophecy we heard certainly fit all the criteria."

"I'm surprised you still remember that," said Mr. Shin dryly.

"The date component is the key," said Sherlock, ignoring Shin. "LV murdered Lestrade's wife on October 25th. He then murdered James and Lily Potter on October 31st. Personal interest in both cases. Another interesting fact: when LV unexpectedly vanished the first time, his loyal followers elected to interrogate Neville Longbottom's parents as a means to find his whereabouts. Why would they pick them? There are plenty of other Aurors to choose from, Moody for example, but they specifically targeted Neville's

parents. "

"I don't know. Why?" asked John, looking like she dreaded the answer.

"LV mentioned them," Sherlock answered. "Remember, he was targeting children. What do Julia Lestrade, Neville Longbottom and Harry Potter have in common?"

John covered her mouth.

"Birthdays," John whispered.

Sherlock nodded.

"July 30th and July 31st," he said. "Neville and Harry were born hours within each other. Lestrade said Julia was born at twilight, exactly one year after Neville. Only a tiny number of children were born in the Magical UK during that time. LV wouldn't have had a lot of filter through."

"Oh G-d…" John muttered, ashen.

"The prophecy also specified the gender," Sherlock continued. "He didn't hunt down Lestrade and Julia after murdering Cecilia Shin. He wouldn't have left it at that if he was after her progeny. But if Voldemort was after a boy and she let it slip she had a daughter, then he would've decided it wasn't worth his time to pursue them after learning this. But it's interesting that he decided to go after Lestrade first."

Sherlock brought hands under his chin, fingertips touching each other.

"It could be psychology, and not any parameters of the prophecy," he mused. "But you would think he would go after Neville first, since he's certifiably pureblood. Instead he went after Julia, who has a witch mother and, as far as he knew, a Muggle father."

"That's irrelevant," John snapped, startling Sherlock out of his thoughts. "So the prophecy specifies the birthday and the gender. What else?"

"That's it," said Sherlock as he eyed John a bit warily, like a boy who knew he was in trouble, but not why. "The prophecy's wording probably didn't imply LV's doom is inevitable, otherwise he wouldn't have acted the way he did. Balance of probability is that the prophecy stated a boy who has the ability to destroy him was to be born at the end of July. There could've been more to prophecy, of course, but that was the extent LV heard."

Sherlock then pinned his eyes on Dumbledore.

"Did I get anything wrong?"

Dumbledore looked at Sherlock for a moment. John watched the two with bated breath.

At length Dumbledore broke the silence:

" *'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches'*," he intoned. " *'born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies… and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not… and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives… the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies…* ' "

There was another bout of silence.

Then Sherlock clicked his tongue.

"Always something."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Gwendolyn Morgan, with a magically amplified voice. "The third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament is about to begin! Mr. Cedric Diggory, who is in first place with eight-five points, will start off. Then Mr. Viktor Krum, who is in second place, with eighty points. Then finally Miss Fleur Delacour, who is in third place, with seventy-two points!"

There was a long applause. Harry, who was filming from his broom, aimed his camera at the box where Dumbledore, Mr. Shin and all

the Ministry of Magic members in attendance were sitting.

"On my whistle," said Morgan. "Three - two - one -"

She gave a short blast on her whistle. Cedric hurried forward into the maze. A few seconds later Viktor and then Fleur.

"So it begins," Harry muttered.

Final Notes : To say getting back into writing after spending an entire month immersed in studying technical things is difficult is like saying running a marathon after a month break due to injuries is challenging… and that's not even counting the horrible thing I had planned for this chapter.

… Which in the end I couldn't do. I took a very inopportune moment in the story to take the break, and I couldn't start off with it. Next chapter definitely. I still have to think long and hard on how long do spells last. Most are not permanent, and even the more persistent spells like Petrificus vanishes after the original caster dies. But then there are permanent sticking charms, which stay even after the caster dies, and the Hallows. I honestly can't tell what exactly JKR had in mind about this. So I defaulted to unless explicitly stated in Canon as permanent, a spell vanishes after caster death. Uh, anyway, hope you liked it. (BOC runs away)

Fallen

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Eighty: Fallen

Fifteen minutes had passed, and the final task of the Triwizard tournament was going in earnest. The audience seemed to hold their collective breath as they watched the three champions tackle the maze. At the moment, Fleur Delecour's skirt was on fire (again), Viktor Krum stomped one flatfoot after reaching a dead-end, and Cedric Diggory ran for his life as an enormous Blast-ended Skrewt scuttled after him, the spells he threw over his shoulder bouncing uselessly off the Skrewt's black and shiny exoskeleton.

John, who was among the thousands sitting in front of the Triwizard tournament's live broadcast, paid no attention whatsoever to the spectacle. She was too busy listening to Dumbledore and Shin.

"It's not just how Harry would react if Lord Voldemort harms you two," Dumbledore said. "We are only able to keep Lord Voldemort at bay because of you… specifically you, John."

"I don't remember doing anything," John protested.

"It is not a matter of doing," said Dumbledore calmly. "It is a matter of *being* ."

John blinked. Sherlock, on the other hand, looked at the headmaster with piercing eyes.

"You've told us four years ago that you had nothing at all to do for Harry's security because everything has already been done," he said. "Time to elaborate on that, don't you think?"

"I agree," said Dumbledore. "I had only a vague notion of what had happened back then, but I have a better idea now. It all began, I'm convinced, the day John was born…"

Harry circled high above the maze, feeling increasingly restless. The urge to jump in and intervene for one the Champions was getting harder and harder to fight off, especially when one of them did something he thought was totally stupid. Indeed, he almost shouted at Cedric when he kept shooting jinxes at the Skrewt, for it was obvious to him the monster's armor was magic-resistant, so one ought to target the Skrewt's fleshy underbelly.

The headset Harry wore made a fizzling sound, and his phone turned purple.

"You can come down now," said Julia's voice. "We should fine with just the fixture cameras."

Harry sighed, relieved. "Okay."

He flew over to the editor's booth, just as Viktor blasted a hole through a hedge, on the opposite direction of the trophy. He shook head as he dismounted.

"Viktor Krum has no sense of direction, land-bound," he declared.

"Why didn't he map the maze beforehand?" Hermione grumbled. "It's not like the hedges were going anywhere."

"Not everyone is clever like you," said Julia, lips twitching. "Come on, sit down, and put your feet up. I have a feeling this is going to take a while."

Harry looked at six holographs Julia was monitoring and editing on the fly. The largest one on the right showed Viktor Krum wiggle through the hole he made, only to fall into an enchanted mist. Though they couldn't see him, they could hear him; the Bulgarian coming out of the mist was turning the air around it blue, literally.

"Yeah…" said Harry ruefully.

"You've told me about your father's late friend Mr. Lee, John," Dumbledore began. "You suspected he was a wizard, based on the fact you once saw him jump twelve feet in the air when he thought no one was looking. June Hu also brought to my attention that, according to you, this Mr. Lee looks like *Master* Lee, the first wizard to have successfully and repeatedly performed a spell considered legendary."

John gaped slightly at this. Sherlock stared at John, looking deeply betrayed.

"When did you tell him? Why did you tell you him? *Why didn't you tell me* ?!" he hissed furiously.

"Uh, I don't know, I forgot," muttered John, avoiding Sherlock's eye.

"You mentioned it in passing," said Mr. Shin. "You then left shortly afterwards, claiming it was Benedict's nap time. I've been told he dislikes sleeping. You probably forgot all about it while trying to put him to bed."

"Y… yeah, that sounds about right," said John hastily. "So what about Mr. Lee? Did he do something? How? I recall you saying he was a lousy wizard who could only do one thing."

"You recall correctly," said Mr. Shin dryly. "He happened to be present when you and your sister were born. You said as much."

"I did?" said John blankly.

Now Sherlock was studying John with grave concern.

"Motherhood ossified your already vacant brain," he declared. "We've agreed to this before, but I think it bears repeating: You're never doing this again."

"I definitely don't want your DNA," John agreed. "But back to Mr. Lee-what did he do?"

"Something really stupid," said Mr. Shin, while Dumbledore chuckled immoderately.

"Like what?" John prompted.

Mr. Shin sighed. Dumbledore stopped laughing.

"He gave his blood to you," said Mr. Shin.

There was stunned silence for a span of a minute. For a while John and Sherlock just blinked.

"… Sorry?" said John weakly.

"He gave his blood to you, Dr. Watson," Mr. Shin repeated.

"But how…?"

"I had the opportunity to interview your sister Harriet, John," Dumbledore explained. "She was able to recall what happened during your birth. Most of the tale should be familiar to you: Your mother and twin brother, sadly, didn't survive. You yourself were doing very poorly, as you no doubt know. What you may not know is that you were at the very cusp of death."

Sherlock seemed to fossilize in his seat.

"Your surviving family held vigil during what they thought was the last hours of your life," Dumbledore continued. "Then in the middle of the night, while everyone slept from exhaustion, Harriet saw her neighbor Mr. Lee sneaking into the NICU."

John swallowed.

"He picked you up," said Dumbledore, "held you close and said:

poor baby. They say you will die. Don't. Live. Then he cut his hand and let the blood flowing from the wound dribble into the pedi-unit connected to you."

John was speechless for a moment.

"… Why would he do that?" John whispered at length.

"There is an old wives' tale in Master Lee's motherland that says consuming wizard's blood will cure all diseases," said Mr. Shin. "Your father was his friend. He wouldn't have wanted his friend to lose even you, after losing his wife and son. So, being the ignorant, colossal fool that he was, Master Lee added his own blood to the transfusion apparatus, thinking his magic would help you live."

"Idiot," Sherlock muttered.

"I agree," said Mr. Shin quietly. "I need not belabor over how badly this could've ended. I still shudder to think. Yet Lee's stupidity made all the wisdom of the world unwise. Who would've thought the dying baby he gave his magic to would change the course of the world?"

"But I'm not-" John started to protest.

"Would we wizards have Sherlock Holmes's help if it weren't for you?" Mr. Shin asked, looking at John piercingly. "Would Harry Potter have grown to be the young man he is now if it weren't for you? *No* . A thousand times, no."

John again didn't know what to say.

"You see this sort of thing often when you live as long as I have," said Mr. Shin, smiling crookedly. "Anyway, Lee's stupid idea worked. You lived. You also became the first and perhaps only one of your kind."

"Which is…?" said Sherlock.

"A Muggle who has magic," said Dumbledore.

The moon was hanging low on top of the Forbidden Forest's canopy. The audience whispered excitedly as they watched the gigantic holograph showing Cedric Diggory facing a Sphinx. From the speakers, one can hear the Sphinx recite the following riddle:

"First think of the person who lives in disguise,

Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.

Next, tell me what's always the last thing to mend,

The middle of middle and end of the end?

And finally give me the sound often heard

During the search for a hard-to-find word.

Now string them together, and answer me this,

Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?"

Cedric gaped at the Sphinx for several heart beats.

"Uh… could I have it again?" he asked, looking stupefied.

The Sphinx blinked, smiled, and repeated the poem. The whispers from the crowd grew louder. The students in the editing booth whispered, too, but they weren't talking about the same thing.

"Spider, it's a *spider* !" Harry muttered furiously. "Oh, c'mon, it's obvious… !"

"Knew it was dangerous," Julia remarked.

"What?" Harry asked, still glaring at the main holograph.

"Letting you film the task," she said. "You looked like you were ready to intervene."

"That happens when you're frustrated," said Harry.

"Remind me to never drive with you. You'd make the most annoying backseat driver," said Julia dryly.

"Wait, do you mean some Muggles drive from the *backseat* ?" said Ron incredulously.

"Well, yes, of course," said Julia, deadpan. "It's very dangerous. Don't try it at home."

Ron looked away, dazed, and muttered how this was even possible. Hermione rolled her eyes at him. Meanwhile, Harry shook his head.

"Oh, give it up," he grumbled, while the holographic Cedric muddled through the riddle, talking aloud. "Krum will un-Stupify himself at the rate you're going…"

"So what?" Sherlock asked impatiently. "John can't use the magic."

"Indeed," said Dumbledore. "John's condition is the exact reverse of Mr. Lestrade's from years past - she has magic, but not the ability to use it. Given its unprecedented nature, it's hard to say the full ramifications. But we do know one effect."

"The ability to drain magic," said Sherlock, unblinking.

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "Have you ever wondered why you can touch wands without any trouble, John? Wands explode when a Muggle touches them. A wizard and witch will never have this problem because they have more magic than a wand, thus magic flows from the wielder to the wand. An explosion is rapid increase in volume and release of energy in an extreme manner. Therefore one can postulate the explosion is caused by the magic in the wand rushing too rapidly into the Muggle upon contact."

"But for this hypothesis to work, you need to prove non-magicals have a medium that lets magic flow in such a way," Sherlock argued. "You know Muggles by definition don't have magic!"

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "And there is such a medium."

"What is it?" Sherlock snapped.

" *Life*," said Dumbledore. "Whether we have magic or not, we are

both human and alive, aren't we?"

Sherlock blinked.

"For a Muggle, Life acts as the medium through which magic flows," said Dumbledore. "For wizards and John Watson, magic itself is the medium that flows in and out. Either way, since magic and life are intrinsically tied together, we might as well say they are practically one."

John nodded slowly. Sherlock glowered at his lap, muttering imprecation against magical intuition.

"The next question to ask is in what direction does magic flow in relation to John," said Dumbledore. "Considering enchanted items rapidly lose their magic when John touches them, it appears that magic flows *into* John."

"Obviously," Sherlock sneered. "So what will happen when John reaches the saturation point?"

"One may guess," said Dumbledore. "We may never know. The magic inside John isn't just stewing. It is likely keeping her alive. A constant rate of expenditure, as it were; I sometimes wonder if that is why you always felt drawn to London, John. London has known magic for millennia."

John said nothing.

"Now the direction in which *all* magic flows in relation to John is critical to us," Dumbledore went on. "I have told you before that I decided to use blood wards to guard Harry, using the shared blood between his mother and her sister. By taking him in- grudgingly and resentfully, but nevertheless willingly- Petunia granted Harry a protection that would have lasted as long as he could call her home *his* home… and until he came of age."

"Doesn't that mean the protection vanished when she died?" asked Sherlock sharply. "She has to live in order call any place home."

"Yes, that is true," said Dumbledore patiently. "Hence I was surprised when I found the protection intact when I visited Harry, you

and John at 221B."

Sherlock frowned, like he was solving a very abstruse cryptogram.

"So… John somehow… absorbed the protection?" he asked. "When we visited 4 Privet Drive?"

"That is my guess," confirmed Dumbledore.

There was a moment of silence.

"Therefore it is vital that you live," said Dumbledore quietly. "So long as you live, granting Harry a home, Lord Voldemort cannot touch him. And as long as Harry has Sherlock Holmes, he won't have any trouble finding the remaining soul fragments that keeps Voldemort anchored to this world. That is my honest belief."

The moon had risen fully in the sky, and the crowd was going wild. Cedric had finally solved the Sphinx's riddle and was sprinting down the passage behind her… a passage that led, through the path to the right, straight to the Triwizard Cup.

"Harry, I know you're bored, but you should at least stay awake for the finale," Hermione scolded.

Harry didn't answer, but remained slumped in his chair with his eyes closed. Hermione sighed impatiently and marched over to shake him awake.

He didn't. His head just rolled to his shoulder. His eyes vibrated under his closed eyelids and he face grimaced as though he was in pain. Then, to Hermione's horror, he started bleeding from the nose and ears.

Ron and Julia looked at him and both swore.

"He's having an LV vision," said Julia, turning white.

"We've got to tell Dumbledore!" Hermione cried as she danced uncertainly on her spot. "He has to know!"

"There's no time for that!" Ron hissed. "Let's just collect the memory and show it on the screen like last time."

Hermione gasped. Julia stared at him.

"The Ministry's going to arrest you," Julia whispered. "You're the head of OBH. They'll make you the scapegoat."

Ron swallowed several times. He looked very white under the freckles.

"… The whole point of OBH is exposing You-Know-Who," Ron growled after a moment, with his fists clenched. "If we don't do it, who knows how much longer the Ministry'll drag their feet? It can't be a good thing anyway, You-Know-Who getting angry enough for Harry to have a vision…"

Julia bit her lip, but she nodded.

"Oh Ron," Hermione murmured, moved and close to tears, "Don't worry… If… if the Ministry does go after you, I'll do everything to make sure they won't-"

"Yeah, thanks," Ron muttered, looking away and shaking all over. "Okay, here it goes…"

Up on the roof of a tall, ancient building, an elderly man stole over towards the ledge. He stopped, plugged earphones into his ears, and removed the long bag he was carrying. He then crouched down and busied himself with the bag's contents. When he stood up again, he had a fully assembled rifle in his hands. He placed the rifle on the ledge and adjusted its position. As he leaned forward, looking into the scope, the light from the adjacent building fell upon his lined and weather-beaten face. His two eyes shone like stars and his features worked convulsively, as though he was beside himself with excitement.

"… Identified target," the man said eventually. "Ready when you are."

There was a pause. Then the man spoke again.

"Target surrounded," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

A high, cold voice answered, seemingly from the very depths.

" *Kill the spares* ."

"… Your speech makes me wonder if you have suicidal tendencies, Dumbledore," said Mr. Shin, heavy with sarcasm. "Should I set you up with a therapist?"

"Thank you, but no," said Dumbledore calmly. "No therapist deserves to meet the likes of me. They may commit suicide themselves."

"You are certainly giving me the temptation," Mr. Shin retorted. "If an old man must die, let it be me. People actually want you around."

"Don't say such horrible things," Dumbledore chided. Then he glanced at the holograph featuring the Triwizard Tournament broadcast. "The final task is over. Apparently Voldemort has chosen not to move today. Shall we move on? Young Master Benedict seems to object to his current surroundings."

John and Sherlock's reply was drowned under Benedict's cries.

"You know, Dumbledore, I agree with Dr. Shin," said John as she, Sherlock and Dumbledore followed after Shin (Benedict crying all the way). "We're not ready to compose your epitaph just yet. Aim for retirement or something."

"I do like the idea," said Dumbledore, smiling. "But June Hu needs to live long enough to give Jacqueline away at her wedding, and then dance at the reception."

"I'm not dancing," Shin snapped.

"She will want you to," Dumbledore said.

"I still refuse."

"She will cry."

"No she won't," Shin scoffed. "But that reminds me, I need to call my daughter."

"Why?" John asked after she and Sherlock looked at each other and grinned.

Mr. Shin smirked briefly as he went ahead, opening the door and stepping out to the open.

"To tell her something she's been waiting to hear for-"

Mr. Shin suddenly jerked in a terrifyingly familiar way. Then he crumpled to the ground.

John froze. She knew what she had seen. She'd seen it unfold numerous times in the Middle East. But for a second that seem to encompass eternity, John doubted all the years of experience. This couldn't happen. Not to that man. Not the…

"Oh shit," John mumbled as she stared at the still body, which had blood slowly oozing underneath. "Oh, *shit*…"

The wall behind them exploded, scattering debris. The peopled around them started to scream as a student-blond, short and stout- also crumpled to the ground like a broken marionette.

John turned and pushed both Sherlock and Dumbledore out of the line of fire, screaming:

" *TAKE COVER* !"

The audience at the Quidditch stands stood as one as they stared at the screen. Their screams of horror joined the screams coming from the speakers next to the screen, which showed a crowd of Muggles running away blindly from the bodies splayed on the pavement, dark liquid pooling beneath them.

"WHY IS THIS HAPPENING AGAIN?!" Fudge wailed. "DUMBLEDORE, WHAT ARE YOU-"

But Dumbledore wasn't paying attention to the Minister of Magic. He was staring at the empty seat next to him, with an expression that looked so much like crushing despair.

There was one person missing from the top box: Grandmaster Shin. He was nowhere to be seen.

He had vanished.

John clung to Dumbledore, who fought against her grip. For a man at least a hundred and twenty years old, he was incredibly strong. On her chest, Benedict screamed hysterically.

"Let me go to him," Dumbledore begged. " *Please… !* "

"You can't save him," Sherlock muttered, holding him back from the other side. "It's too late."

Dumbledore lurched forward. His normally bright blue eyes were wild. John had to look away.

"I can still…" Dumbledore started to mutter.

Sherlock made a move that left Dumbledore shoved against a pillar. Then he slapped him, hard.

" *Pull yourself together* !" Sherlock roared. "Think! Why would LV kill him? The magical security he put on the Department of Mysteries will be gone when he dies!"

"No…" said Dumbledore, his eyes still wild and empty.

Sherlock slapped him again.

" *You can't panic now* !" he shouted. "Your world is in danger! Shin's entire *family* is danger! You can cry later! *Just - not - now!* "

Dumbledore stared uncomprehendingly at Sherlock for a long, drawn moment.

Then, finally, he vanished with a small pop.

Sherlock wrapped his arms around John immediately. Together they huddled behind a pillar, Benedict sobbing hard between them.

"Dumbledore, you poor man…" he muttered.

Final Notes : I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

What You See Is Not What You Get

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Eighty One: What You See Is Not What You Get

It was difficult to say how long Moran kept firing. John felt it too long, regardless, as her thoughts went in a loop: *Why is he still shooting, where is backup, how can I tell this to Jackie, please not Benedict, please don't cry baby…*

Eventually John heard sirens over the screams. Flashing blue and red lights hit the opposite wall. The gun shots stopped. At least John thought it did. She couldn't focus. Her entire world was narrowed down to Sherlock around her and Benedict bawling inconsolably into her chest.

John eventually tuned into the sound of someone shouting orders over a megaphone. The voice sounded unfamiliar. It told the citizens where to go.

"Backup?" John asked, as she willed Benedict to stop crying.

"Yes," Sherlock whispered.

John let out a shuddering sigh. Megaphone person continued speak. Soon John unwound enough to look up and around. The first thing she saw was a trail of blood. John looked away quickly.

There was another gun shot. The person on the megaphone was cut off mid-sentence. The screaming renewed with greater furor.

John felt a chill run through her body. "Did he just…?" John asked weakly.

Sherlock nodded mutely.

John swallowed. "But that doesn't… he's-"

"Moran isn't a true sniper anymore," Sherlock muttered. "If he was, he would've stopped after he shot Shin. He's *wants* a killing spree. Obviously."

John felt sickened to the soul.

"Obviously…"

The two of them fell silent again. The noise in the background increased, as the police presumably scrambled to defend themselves against the shooter. John and Sherlock stayed where they were.

Then John phone's vibrated out of the blue.

A thousand thoughts ran through John's mind. Who could it be? Dumbledore? Sirius? Jacqueline? Or was it Mrs. Hudson, calling them frantically to make sure they were alright after watching the news? Had enough time elapsed for the press to descend upon King's?

John took out the phone. There was a new text message. The sender's number was hidden. The locked screened flashed the following message:

Catch me if you can John

"What…?" John began.

The phone vibrated again. There was another text:

One kill per minute to help you along

Ron stared, horrified, at the large screen showing terrified Muggles screaming, fleeing and getting shot at. So did his friends, who may not be any longer.

He blew it. He completely blew it. Harry's vision was the worst thing he could've aired, and it didn't even show You-Know-Who. He ruined it for everyone and the Ministry was going to send him to Azkaban and…

… and…

"Oh, no, no, no, *no*," Hermione squeaked. "Why didn't we check the memory first, we should've checked it, we should've-oh *NO!* " she screamed and pointed. "Fudge and the Ministry are heading this way!"

Ron looked in spite of himself. He saw Fudge, Dumbledore, Madam Bones and a half a dozen Aurors wearing scarlet robes hurrying towards them.

Ron collapsed to the ground. He wanted to hide or just throw up. He was done for. Things couldn't get any worse.

"Don't panic!" Julia shouted suddenly. "We're not the ones airing that footage! It's from someone else!"

Ron and Hermione stared at her, shocked, bowled-over and completely confused.

"No, wait, *what* ?" Ron sputtered.

Julia pointed at the six holographs in front of her.

"These are from the cameras and this is from Harry," she said swiftly, pointing at the five small holographs and then the large one dominating the right side of her desk. "The final cut is what I'm transmitting to the screen. See? They don't match!"

Ron squinted. The final cut holograph indeed showed something entirely different from the footage displayed on the screen.

It featured a dark chamber, as high as a church and full of nothing but towering shelves covered in small, dusty, glass orbs. They glimmered dully in the light issuing from candle brackets set at intervals along the shelves. Each bracket held a blue-flame candle. As Ron watched, the perspective moved slowly down a row of shelves. The camera then focused on the orbs and the yellowed and dusty label affixed below them. In closer inspection, some of the orbs glowed with a faint inner light and yet others were dark.

Ron had just started to feel puzzled at what he was seeing when a group of people marched into the editor's tent. As one, Ron, Hermione, Julia and Neville jumped in front of Harry, who was still unconscious, and hid him from view. Then Ron turned to face the new arrivals.

There was Madam Bones, the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. She looked grave and serious. The Aurors accompanying Bones held similarly grim and thunderous expressions to a person. Professor Dumbledore, who stood further back, looked like he aged another century. But Fudge was beside himself.

"So it was *your* doing!" shouted Fudge, crushing his lime-green bowler in one hand and pointing a finger at Ron with the other. " *You* were responsible for this whole mess!"

Ron gulped. Madam Bones grimaced.

"Fudge…" she started.

"Arrest him! Now!" ordered Fudge, now facing the Aurors. "We've caught him red-handed! He's the only one who can send the images to the screen!"

"Fudge," Madam Bones said again, more firmly. The Aurors didn't move.

"WHY ARE YOU JUST STANDING THERE!?" Fudge shouted. His face was puce with anger. Spit was flying out of his mouth.

"Fudge, if you can be reasonable *just this once* !" said Madam

Bones angrily. "Look at the images they're editing! None of them are showing the carnage! Obviously they've got nothing to do with it!"

Fudge gaped at Madam Bones. He seemed to shrink like a beaten dog.

"But… Can't you see…?" he whimpered pathetically.

Madam Bones just turned away, looking disgusted.

"I've heard enough from you," said Madam Bones curtly. "My apologies, Mr. Weasley," she added, turning to Ron. "His words don't represent the Ministry. I hope you know that."

Ron nodded numbly. He couldn't believe how things turned out.

A tall, black and bald Auror tapped Madam Bones' shoulder.

"Ma'am," he said with a deep voice. He gestured at the final-cut holograph. "Isn't that…?"

Madam Bone immediately turned aghast when she saw the holograph featuring the dark chamber.

"This can't be!" she cried. "That hall has maximum security! Shin guards the place personally! How did you gain access to it?"

She looked at Ron, who froze once again. Julia worked on her throat and just trembled.

Hermione stepped to the front, looking frightened but also incredibly brave.

"That… that is the question *we* want to ask the Ministry!" she said, wobbly at first, but more steadily and forcefully as she went on. "The Ministry inspected and verified all our cameras! Harry's not even filming right now! So all we can broadcast is the maze! Isn't it more likely a Ministry insider broke into the MMN? We're using the Magical Mobile Network because you insisted on it! What is this place, anyway?"

"That's none of your business," growled another Auror. "This is

classified information. Ma'am, we should-"

"That's not important, Dwalish, you fool!" snapped Madam Bones before turning to all the Aurors. "Everyone, get back to the Ministry! Get back *now* ! The Department of Mysteries has been breached!"

And with that, Madam Bones and the Aurors hurried out of the tent. Fudge lingered, looking equal parts betrayed and furious. But eventually, he too, shuffled out after them.

Ron gaped open-mouthed in the silence that followed. He felt numb. He couldn't even begin to comprehend what had just happened. All he knew was that he wasn't out of the woods just yet. In fact, it was quite possible he was in a deeper mess than he'd initially thought.

There was a rustle. Ron looked impulsively, fearing the worst. But instead of more Aurors, Ron's parents galloped inside, and before he knew it, Ron had all the air squeezed out of him as his mother and father crushed him in a tight hug.

"Ron… oh, Ron, dear, are you alright?" Mum asked frantically.

Ron mumbled something incoherent. His dad gripped his shoulder painfully from the other side.

"Don't worry, Ron, it'll be alright!" Dad cried. "We'll take care of this. We'll manage."

Relief - glorious relief washed over Ron, even as he wondered how they were going to manage. Though the assurance made no logistical sense whatsoever, he couldn't help but believe his parents would take care of everything. From the corner of his eye, Ron saw Mr. Lestrade giving similar reassurances to Julia as he held his daughter very tightly.

Ron was able to gather his bearing after Mum stopped clutching him. He noticed Mr. Jason standing awkwardly in the corner. He seemed to be observing Dumbledore, who had been curiously silent throughout.

Mr. Jason approached the headmaster tentatively.

"Are you alright, sir?" he asked.

Dumbledore slowly turned to Mr. Jason. Ron couldn't help but note how desolate the headmaster's normally bright blue eyes looked.

"Oh, Jason, I don't know how to tell you," said Dumbledore bleakly. "But I believe… the footage on the screen showed your father getting shot."

Mr. Jason didn't even flinch. "I see."

Dumbledore looked at him sharply.

"You're not surprised."

"He warned us," said Mr. Jason.

Dumbledore's blue eyes blazed with a hidden fire as he regarded Mr. Jason. Everyone seemed to hold their breath as they watched the two.

At length Dumbledore let out an explosive sigh that sounded like a sob and a laugh.

"Your father is the most cold-hearted and mean-spirited blackguard I've ever had the pleasure to meet," he declared.

Mr. Jason scratched the back of his head, looking very embarrassed. "He is. Sorry, sir."

"Wait, back up!" Mr. Lestrade shouted, looking as galvanized as Ron felt. "Did you just say my FIL got *shot* !?"

"By the sniper Moran," said Dumbledore helpfully.

"THEN WHY ARE YOU SO CALM?!" roared Mr. Lestrade. "JASON WHAT THE F- IS WRONG WITH YOU!?"

"Dad pulled this sort of shite often when he was a freedom fighter in his teens and twenties," Mr. Jason explained.

Mr. Lestrade wheezed like someone kicked him in the stomach.

Julia looked no better.

"… HE WAS A *FREEDOM FIGHTER* ?!" Mr. Lestrade eventually bellowed, for the lack of better idea, probably.

"Yeah, like William Wallace," said Mr. Jason. "He's secretly a hundred and five, remember? He grew up during the colonial times. He *knows* war."

Mr. Lestrade looked like he was about to punch Mr. Jason's face out of rage, but at that moment, Harry woke up.

"Professor Dumbledore! Voldemort broke into a place called the Hall of Prophecies!" he shouted.

"Yes, I know," said Dumbledore. "You need not worry. I'm already there."

Harry frowned. "But you're here."

"The blackguard I call friend taught me a very useful spell," said Dumbledore, shaking his head like a man who'd just realised how thoroughly he'd been suckered. "It lets me be at two places at the same time."

Still shaking his head, Dumbledore reached into his pocket and pulled out a teacup shaped like a ceramic tube.

"Harry, could you do me a favour?" asked Dumbledore.

"Uh, sure," said Harry, looking at the headmaster curiously.

"This will take you to the Department of Mysteries," said Dumbledore. "I need you to find me there and tell me that he lives."

Harry gaped as he worked that out. "O-okay."

Ron broke free of his mother before he knew what he was doing.

"I'm going too!" he blurted.

"Me too!" Neville chimed in.

"You're not sending him alone!" Hermione exclaimed.

"We're all going!" Julia shouted.

"Ron, no! It's too dangerous!" cried Mum while Dad sputtered.

"I have to go, Mum!" said Ron furiously. "You can't stop me!"

"Don't talk back to me, young man!" Mum shouted. Then she rounded at Dumbledore. "Why are you sending Harry?! Surely you can go there yourself!"

"Julia… babe…" Mr. Lestrade protested.

"Shut up dad," Julia snapped. "Clones can't do magic, and the Dumbledore here is a clone."

His parents and Mr. Lestrade started at this. Ron sensed the opportunity.

He shared one look with Harry, Hermione, Neville and Julia. Then they all dived for Dumbledore's teacup.

In the middle of the dim and silent gloom of the Hall of Prophecies, a straw-haired young man lay twitching on the floor. He was foaming at the mouth and his eyes were completely rolled to the back of his skull. Standing a little apart from him was another man. He was tall, skeletally thin and black robed, and he had a gaunt, bone-white face and scarlet slit-pupils for eyes.

It was Lord Voldemort, and the young man twitching at his feet was Barty Crouch, Jr. Voldemort regarded Crouch dispassionately, almost disdainfully.

"What a waste," he said softly.

Then he took a step back, and made movements to turn.

"Good evening, Tom," said a voice.

Voldemort looked up.

He saw Dumbledore walking towards him. Dumbledore's stride and stance was that of a person taking a leisurely stroll. The aura of icy calm enveloping the old headmaster, however, befitted a man entering a battlefield.

"You found me early," Voldemort remarked.

"I found you late," said Dumbledore in a deadly calm voice.

Voldemort smiled a terrible lipless smile.

"Did you like what I did to Shin? I made sure Moran shot the real one and not one of his pesky duplicates."

Dumbledore flicked his wand out in lieu of an answer. A golden shockwave tore through the hall. The tall shelves to his either side toppled over each other like dominos. The glass orbs on the shelves fell to the ground. Ghostly images of people rose like smoke as they shattered. Voldemort conjured a shining silver shield just before the shockwave-spell hit him. The spell did no damage to the shield, but a deep gong-like note reverberated from it.

"You are angry," said Voldemort, his scarlet eyes narrowed over the top of the shield. "You are actually *angry* ."

"I'm quite furious, yes," said Dumbledore. "You did a very foolish thing, Tom… very foolish indeed. You shouldn't have killed him."

Voldemort responded with a killing curse. Dumbledore turned and vanished with a whirling of his cloak. Next second, he reappeared behind Voldemort. Voldemort waved his wand and another jet of green light streaked at Dumbledore, who waved his wand at the broken shelves. They clustered together before him like a fortress and shattered into dust when the killing curse dissipated uselessly against them. Dumbledore waved his wand a third time and a glass centaur, armed with a bow, formed from the broken glass orbs. The centaur cantered around Voldemort, aiming an arrow at him menacingly.

"You do not seek to kill me?" called Voldemort. "Above such

brutality, are you?"

"Merely taking your life would not satisfy me," said Dumbledore as he walked towards Voldemort. "Indeed, I find it comforting to know that there are other ways to destroy a man… ways that are much worse than death."

"Nothing is worse than death, Dumbledore!" snarled Voldemort. Then he added mockingly, "So you want good old-fashioned revenge! So much for the great Albus Dumbledore, the epitome good! Should you not be above this sort of thing?"

Voldemort flicked his wand. The shards of the broken glass orbs rose as one and flung themselves towards Dumbledore like a thousand sharp needles. Dumbledore whipped his wand around him. A ring of fire burst out from the end. It circled Dumbledore like a shield and burned the glass shards to ashes before they could reach him. Voldemort fired another killing curse, and the glass centaur galloped in front it. It took the blast and shattered into a hundred pieces. In the meantime, Dumbledore vanished again.

Dumbledore reappeared and waved his wand as though brandishing a whip. A long thin flame flew from the tip; it wrapped itself around Voldemort, shield and all. But the fiery rope turned into a serpent, and relinquished its hold on Voldemort at once and turned, hissing furiously, to face Dumbledore.

Dumbledore brandished his wand in one long, fluid movement before the snake could strike. The snake flew high into the air and vanished in a wisp of smoke. Voldemort vanished with it.

"Well, no," said Dumbledore calmly as he waited for Voldemort to reappear again. "Apparently, I am neither."

Final Notes : So is Shin dead or not? What do you think? (FYI: I'm a wimp).

I've selected Mr. Shin's age as 105 deliberately. He was born just before his motherland was annexed/colonized in 1910. The attempt

to turn him into a soul wand happened in 1919, when a nation-wide nonviolent resistance movement was ruthlessly crushed by colonial forces and the participants were massacred by the tens of thousands. As a young man he joined the Independence Movement as a guerrilla fighter. Thus he knows a lot about warfare.

The next chapter should be the last chapter of ASIM.

(There will be a sequel! It's tentatively titled: *A Study in Magic: the Application*)

The Hidden Plan

A Study in Magic

by *Books of Change*

Warning/Notes : This is a BBC Sherlock and Harry Potter crossover AU. The HP timeline and BBC Sherlock's timeline has been shifted forwards and backwards to match up. One major BBC Sherlock character's gender has changed for the sake of the plot. The story was planned and written before season 2, but incorporates elements of season 2 as much as possible. Readers beware!

Chapter Eight Two: The Hidden Plan

Harry's feet hit solid ground; his knees buckled a little and the ceramic teacup fell to the ground and rolled away. Ron stumbled and fell on a polished wooden floor, and Neville landed on top of him, making them both grunt. Julia and Hermione were still standing, looking very windswept.

Once everyone had gathered their wits and were back on their feet, they looked around. They were in a corridor where nothing was moving but the nearest torches, flickering subtly. At the end of the corridor was a plain black door that looked hauntingly familiar.

"There?" asked Hermione squeakily, as she picked up the teacup from the floor.

Harry nodded. "Let's go," he whispered, and he led the way down the corridor.

They stopped again within six feet of the door.

"Did your grandpa ever take you here for a tour?" Harry asked as he stared at it apprehensively.

Julia shook her head, "Classified Information."

Harry approached the door. What felt like a million questions circled inside his head as the door swung open and he marched over the threshold, the others at his heels.

Why did Dumbledore leave a clone behind at Hogwarts? Why did he have a *portkey* that would take a person directly to the Department of Mysteries? Why did Mr. Shin deliberately let himself get shot? Did he use a clone? Dumbledore seemed convinced it was the real Mr. Shin who got shot, but how did he know? Was Mr. Shin really alright? Guns and bullets were nothing to sniff at. Sherlock got punched in the face once by John for showing Harry gruesome pictures of gunshot wounds because he thought it was a point worth driving home…

Harry pushed his thoughts away and looked around. They were standing in a large, circular room. Everything in here was black including the floor and ceiling. Identical, unmarked and black doors without handles were set at intervals all around the black walls, interspersed with branches of candles whose flames burned blue. Their cool, shimmering light reflected in the shining marble floor made it look as though there was dark water underfoot.

"Someone shut the door," Harry muttered.

He regretted giving this order the moment Neville had obeyed it. Without the long chink of light from the torch-lit corridor behind them, the place became so dark that for a moment the only things they could see were the shivering blue flames on the walls and their ghostly reflections in the floor. Then there was a great rumbling noise and the candles began to move sideways. The circular wall was rotating.

For a few seconds, the blue flames around them were blurred to resemble neon lines as the wall sped around. Then, quite as suddenly as it had started, the rumbling stopped and everything became stationary again.

"What was that about?" whispered Ron fearfully, while Hermione clung to his arm.

"I think it was to stop us from knowing which door we came in through," said Julia in a hushed voice.

Harry knew she was right: he could no sooner identify the exit door than locate an ant on the jet-black floor, and the door through which they needed to proceed could be any one of the dozen surrounding them.

"How are we going to get back out?" said Neville uncomfortably.

"That's not important," said Harry forcefully. "We need to find Dumbledore. He can take us back once we tell- errr, once we find him."

"Where do we go, then, Harry?" Ron asked.

"I don't know," said Harry, swallowing. "In my dream, I went through the door at the end of the corridor and into a dark room - that's this one - and then I went through another door into a room that… *glitters* ."

"We should try a few doors, then," said Hermione.

So they did. The first door they pushed open led to a large rectangular room that was much brighter than the dark room, thanks to the lamps hanging low on golden chains from the ceiling. The place was quite empty except for a few desks and, in the very middle of the room, an enormous glass tank of deep green liquid, big enough for all of them to swim in, and a number of pearly-white objects drifting around lazily in it… objects that turned out to be tiny swimming *brains* .

They hurried out of the room, knowing at first glance that it wasn't the glittering room they were looking for. Hermione marked the door with a fiery 'X', so they would know which door they'd already tried, before the dark room's circular walls started spinning again.

The second door they pushed didn't budge. Harry and Hermione both used the Alohomora charm on it, but nothing happened.

"Right, we're leaving that door," said Hermione decisively after putting her wand away.

"But what if that's the one?" said Ron, staring at the door with a mixture of apprehension and longing.

"It can't be. Harry was able to go through the door in his dream," said Hermione, marking the door with another fiery cross.

The third door they pushed open led to another rectangular room, larger than the first, but dimly lit. The centre of it was sunken, forming a great stone pit some twenty feet deep. They stood at the topmost tier of what seemed to be stone benches running all around the room and descending in steep steps like an amphitheatre. In the centre of the pit there was a stone dais, on which stood a stone archway that looked so ancient, cracked and crumbling that Harry was amazed the thing was still standing. Unsupported by any surrounding wall, the archway was hung with a tattered black curtain or veil which, despite the complete stillness of the cold surrounding air, was fluttering very slightly as though it had just been touched.

"… Not the right one, let's go," said Hermione. She looked thoroughly frightened-more frightened than when she first arrived at the dark circular room, or when she looked upon the tank of swimming brains.

Harry didn't move. He thought the archway had an odd beauty to it, old as it was. The gently rippling veil intrigued him; he felt a very strong inclination to go down the steps, climb up on the dais and walk through it.

"C'mon, Harry!" said Hermione, grabbing Harry's arm and pulling. "We don't have much time!"

But Harry resisted. When he strained his ears, he fancied he heard whispers echoing up from the dais. Harry leaned forward to listen more closely.

"Harry, please!" said Hermione, tugging more forcefully. "We have to find Dumbledore!"

"Dumbledore," Harry repeated, still gazing, mesmerized, at the swaying veil. "Yeah… Right…"

With difficulty, he wrenched his eyes away from the veil. On his side, Julia and Neville were still staring, apparently entranced, at the veil. Without speaking, Hermione took hold of Julia's arm, Ron grabbed Neville's, and they marched them firmly back out of the door.

"What d'you reckon that arch was?" Harry asked as they reentered the dark circular room.

"I don't know, but whatever it was, it was dangerous," Hermione said firmly, again inscribing a fiery cross on the door.

"How can anyone work here without their heads going around the bend?" Ron muttered as the walls started to turn.

"My grandpa's not crazy," said Julia defensively.

"John said anyone who lets himself get shot is certifiably insane," Harry said.

"That would mean all army field operatives are loonies," Julia retorted. "Grandpa wasn't planning to get shot, I don't think. He just told me because of Moran, the chances of him getting shot increased tenfold."

That was reasonable, Harry had to admit. "Did he tell you what he was going to do about it?"

"No, he just said he's taking care of it."

"Aren't you worried?"

"Well, *yeah*," snapped Julia, while blue lines of light ran across her pale face. "But grandpa isn't the type to just roll over and die, so-"

"Stop it, you two," said Hermione sharply, as the wall slid to a halt. "Pick the next door."

Harry picked an unmarked door at random. He knew right away they chose the right one by the beautiful, dancing, diamond-sparkling light. As Harrys eyes became accustomed to the brilliant glare, he saw clocks gleaming from every surface, large and small, grandfather and carriage, hanging in spaces between the bookcases

or standing on desks ranging the length of the room, so that a busy, relentless ticking filled the place like thousands of minuscule, marching footsteps. The source of the dancing, diamond-bright light was a towering crystal ball jar that stood at the far end of the room.

"This is it! This way!"

Harry's heart was pumping frantically now that he knew they were on the right track. He led the way down the narrow space between the lines of desks, heading, as he had done in his dream, for the source of the light, the crystal bell jar quite as tall as he was that stood on a desk and appeared to be full of a billowing, glittering wind. When they got close, Harry noted the tiny, jewel-bright egg drifting along in the sparkling current inside the jar. As it rose in the jar, it cracked open and a hummingbird emerged, which was carried to the very top of the jar, but as it fell on the draught its feathers became bedraggled and damp again, and by the time it had been borne back to the bottom of the jar it had been enclosed once more in its egg.

"So weird," Harry muttered as he jogged past the jar to the only door behind it.

Harry stopped before the door and glanced around at them all. They had their wands out and looked suddenly serious and anxious. He looked back at the door and pushed. It swung open.

He immediately felt a blast of heat and light. It was as though he'd open the door to a blazing, hot furnace. The next second the heat and light was gone, leaving a chill in its wake. Harry squinted at the room beyond the threshold.

It was clearly the Hall of Prophecies, though it didn't look at all like the place he'd seen in the dream. The dark, high hall lying beyond the door had broken shelves, shattered glass and cracked globes everywhere. A little distance away, a huge fiery serpent was getting gobbled up by giant ball of water. The ball seemed to grow bigger and bigger as it drew more water from a wand belonging to one of the two wizards battling each other. Harry studied the wizards, and quickly realized the black robed wizard was Voldemort and the one controlling the ball of water was Dumbledore.

And at that same moment, Harry fully understood why people said Dumbledore was one of the vanishingly few wizards Lord Voldemort had ever feared. The look upon Dumbledore's face as he stared at Voldemort was more terrible than Harry could have ever imagined. There was no benign smile upon Dumbledore's face, no twinkle in the eyes behind the spectacles. There was cold fury in every line of the ancient face, and a sense of power radiated from Dumbledore as though he was giving off burning heat.

Harry ran towards Dumbledore, a rush of pity overwhelming the fear flooding his veins. There could be only one reason behind Dumbledore's fury: his belief Mr. Shin was dead. That the two may be close friends was a thought very strange and foreign to Harry, but the sheer depth of Dumbledore's anger all but screamed it.

"Professor Dumbledore, Mr. Shin isn't dead!" Harry shouted. "He's *alive* !"

The fiery serpent vanished. The ball burst, and water fell on the floor with crash, sending waves everywhere and drenching the debris. The entire hall then seemed to come to a sudden stop. Both Voldemort and Dumbledore stared at Harry for a moment, Dumbledore looking as galvanized as he'd ever been.

"Potter," said Voldemort in his high, cold voice; perhaps it was Harry's imagination, but he sounded a bit out of breath. "You're lying…"

"It's true!" yelled Harry, and as he shouted it, pain seared across his forehead; his scar was on fire, and he felt a surge of fury that was quite disconnected to his own emotions. "Professor, your clone told us to tell you that he lives! Madam Bones and the Aurors are heading this way, too!"

"Don't be fool," said Voldemort. "I know a clone when I see one… and I know what guns are capable of… my sniper definitely killed the dear old Grandmaster…"

Dumbledore appeared to think it over. Voldemort, in the meantime, whipped his wand at Harry.

" *AVADA KEDAVRA!* " he shrieked.

Harry stared at the jet of green light flying towards him. His mind was blank and his wand was pointing uselessly at the floor.

" *No* !" Neville and Julia screamed.

" *Protego!* " cried Hermione and Ron's voice.

Two shields erupted around Harry. A flock of paper charms and glass seagulls rushed to fill the remaining space between him and Voldemort. The spell burned right through the cluster of glass and paper and then shattered the shields. At that same moment, out of nowhere, Fawkes swooped down in front of Harry, opened his beak wide and swallowed the jet of green light whole: he burst into flame and fell to the floor, small, wrinkled and flightless.

"Your time is up, Tom," said Dumbledore. The cold fury Harry saw earlier was no longer on his countenance.

"So you think," Voldemort spat.

Then he was gone.

For a while there was nothing but silence. Surely it was over, Harry thought as he took a step back. Voldemort decided to flee. Surely he ran away…

"Don't move, Harry!" Dumbledore bellowed. For the first time, Dumbledore sounded frightened. Harry couldn't see why. The hall was empty except for him, his friends and Dumbledore, and the baby phoenix Fawkes croaking feebly on the floor.

Then Harry's scar burst open: it was pain beyond imagining, pain past endurance.

He was locked in the coils of a creature with red eyes, so tightly bound that Harry did not know where his body ended and the creature's body began: they were fused together, bound by pain, and there was no escape…

The creature spoke, using Harry's mouth; in his agony he felt his jaw

move.

" *Kill me now, Dumbledore…* "

Blinded and every part of him screaming for release, Harry felt the creature use him again…

" *If death is nothing, Dumbledore, kill the boy*…"

Let the pain stop, thought Harry… let him kill us… end it, Dumbledore… death is nothing compared to this…

… But if I die, John will cry…

As Harry's heart filled with a powerful longing and grief, the creature's coils loosened, and the pain was gone. Harry was lying face down on the floor, shivering as though he lay upon ice.

There were voices echoing through the hall, more voices than there should have been. Harry opened his eyes, raised his head a little and found Dumbledore's crooked nose inches from his own.

"Are you all right, Harry?"

"Yes," said Harry, shaking so violently he could not hold his head up properly. "Yeah, I'm - where's Voldemort, where - who are all these - what's -"

The hall was full of people; a stream of witches and wizards were emerging from the door behind them. As Dumbledore pulled him back to his feet, Harry saw Madam Bones leading a stunned-looking Cornelius Fudge forward.

"He was there!" shouted a scarlet-robed man with a ponytail, pointing at the rubble. "I saw him, Mr. Fudge, I swear it was You-Know-Who!"

"I know, Williamson, I know, I saw him too!" gibbered Fudge. "Merlin's beard - here - *here!* - in the Ministry of Magic! Great heavens above - it doesn't seem possible - my word - how can this be -?"

"If you dig through this rubble," said Dumbledore, apparently satisfied that Harry was all right, and walking forwards so that the newcomers realised he was there, "you will find a convicted Death Eater many thought to have perished in Azkaban thirteen years ago. Also, at King's College Waterloo campus, you will find a wizard named Sebastian Moran. If you hurry, you will be able to stop him from harming innocent bystanders in his effort to shoot Harry's adoptive parents under Lord Voldemort's orders."

Harry felt like his body turned to ice, as mind-numbing terror filled his veins. Fudge goggled.

" *Dumbledore* !" gasped Fudge, beside himself with amazement. "You - here - I - what are you talking about?"

"Cornelius, just a few minutes ago you saw proof, with your own eyes, that I have been telling you the truth these past four months!" said Dumbledore in a thunderous voice. "Yes, Lord Voldemort has returned, your efforts to discredit me has almost bankrupted the Ministry and cost several people their lives, and now it is time you listened to sense!"

"I - don't - well," Fudge blustered, looking around as though hoping somebody would tell him what to do. No one did, but Madam Bones stepped forward.

"Shacklebolt! Williamson!" she barked. "Go to King's college and stop Moran! Make sure Mr. and Mrs. Holmes are safe!"

Two scarlet-robed wizards nodded and went away. Harry felt his terror abate a little. Fudge gaped at Bones before snapping his attention back at Dumbledore.

"Yes, yes, do go ahead," he muttered. "Now Dumbledore, you - you will need to tell me exactly - the Hall of Prophecies - what happened?"

"We can discuss that after I have sent my students back to Hogwarts," said Dumbledore.

"Your - your *students* ?"

Fudge wheeled around and stared at Harry, who turned around and was startled to find Hermione, Ron, Julia and Neville standing right behind him.

"Harry - Harry Potter?" gasped Fudge, goggling worse than ever. "And all of the - why - what's all this about?"

"I shall explain everything," repeated Dumbledore, "when Harry and his friends are back at school."

Then he walked away from the Ministry officials, and headed towards his students.

"Don't worry, Harry," Dumbledore said quietly. "John and Sherlock took cover as soon as they realised Moran was shooting. They should be safe as long as they stay where they are. I also doubt John would let Sherlock risk his life foolishly."

Harry closed his eyes. The fear flooding his veins seemed to subside, and in its wake he felt a desire to scream, punch someone, or laugh hysterically.

Of course John and Sherlock were safe… they knew how to handle a gun fight… but then again, Dumbledore had no idea… no idea at all… *Sherlock* running to his death in the middle of a firefight was the very least of his worries…

Sherlock grabbed John before she could hand Benedict over to him and rush off.

" *Don't*," said Sherlock, holding firmly.

"But he'll-" John protested.

"No doubt Moran will make good his threat," said Sherlock. "He's counting on you to come out in the open to save the life of strangers."

"Got any better ideas, then?" John snarled. "You're the genius here!"

"I do, as a matter fact," said Sherlock haughtily. "I'll call backup."

John stared. "What backup? The police?"

"As if," Sherlock sneered. Then he called: " *Dobby* !"

There was a loud crack and Dobby appeared before them. John's jaw dropped.

"We found Winky's murderer," Sherlock lied solemnly. "He is at that building over there, on the roof."

Sherlock jerked his thumb at the building where the shots were coming from. Dobby looked up at it, looking very pale and angry. John closed her mouth as the elf balled his tiny fists.

"You can take us up there, yeah?" asked John quickly.

"Yes, Dobby can, Dr. Watson, ma'am," squeaked Dobby, still glaring at the building. "But Dr. Watson and Mr. Sherlock need not go themselves. Mr. Sherlock and Dr. Watson should not risk their lives when they have Harry Potter and little baby Benedict to look after. Dobby will take care of the evil dark wizard who murdered Winky!"

And with that, Dobby cracked out of sight.

John and Sherlock stared at each other in astonishment.

"Did you expect that?" asked John.

"No," said Sherlock, shaking his head.

John nodded, "Okay."

They stayed behind the pillar, listening for gunshots. After hearing none for a full minute (much to John's private amazement), John hurried over to Shin.

John first checked Shin's pulse. It fluttered against her fingers, very faintly. John then checked the rest of him. Blood was seeping out of the old man's right side, the bullet that penetrated his torso acting as an inadequate cork stoppering a bottle. John quickly handed

Benedict over to Sherlock, and pulled out their medical kit from their enchanted nappy bag. John then reached out to cut Shin's shirt, but encountered something very solid about a quarter inch away from his clothes.

"He's wearing bulletproof armour," said John, surprised.

"Of course he is," growled Sherlock, as Benedict beat his little fists against his face, screeching. "He asked for one after the meeting. He probably enchanted the one Mycroft gave him to be both feather-light and invisible, and wore it ever since."

John tore off the invisible armour. She couldn't tell exactly what type based on the weight for obvious reasons, but its shape and thickness suggested it could withstand rifle rounds (and John could count on Mycroft to be thorough). Sherlock muttered a series of deductions while John worked to seal Shin's punctured chest.

"The bullet didn't shatter upon contact, meaning it was a high velocity bullet. The depth of penetration also implies Moran is using an armour piercing rifle. Stolen from a military cache, perhaps? Shin seems to have put some kind of spell that drastically reduced the fragmentation and blunt force trauma under the impact point; his condition more resembles a knife wound than a bullet wound. Either way, damn it, Mycroft, you should've splurged and given him a type IV…"

John had just finished giving Shin emergency treatment when they heard approaching footsteps. Sherlock pulled John back to their shelter, and John tapped the charmed button that turned her green mackintosh jacket bright pink.

The paramedics only spared Sherlock, John and Benedict huddled behind a pillar a brief look before descending upon Shin, probably signing them off as an ordinary micro-family caught in a firefight gone FUBAR. John and Sherlock used this tactic often to avoid the public, press and police (in that order). It worked well; most people blundered around chasing after their mental image of *Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson*, while the real John and Sherlock, with their ordinary-looking appearance, roamed the streets of London undetected. Adding Harry-and later Benedict- into the mix only

perfected the obfuscation. Sherlock didn't do ordinary, as everyone well knew.

Before long, the paramedics had Shin on a wheeled stretcher. John had a lot of things she wanted to say to them, but couldn't: the rifle rounds Moran probably used (9.6g), Shin's actual age (105) and his Magus positive blood…

John swallowed hard as she remembered what happened to wizards transfused with Muggle blood. Shin required emergency treatment and possibly a transfusion. Mycroft, the bastard, had used up all the Magus positive blood in London, if not the UK, for his experiments. There were ways to recover from the magic-loss, of course, but the months- perhaps *years* - it would take Shin to recover meant…

"I texted Robert," said Sherlock quietly. "He'll treat him even if he has to waylay the attending doctor."

John let out a shuddering sigh of relief.

The EMT team rushed away in good time. Sherlock and John waited some more after they left. Dobby didn't teleport back.

"Did something happen to him?" asked John worriedly.

"If so, then Moran would be shooting again by now," Sherlock pointed out. "But it's odd. Let's check."

He pulled out the invisibility cloak Sirius lent to them from their nappy bag and flung it over them. Unlike Harry's heirloom invisibility cloak, Sirius's cloak felt heavy and John swore passersby could see invisible ripples whenever they moved. Sherlock and John left their shelter after both were convinced they were completely covered. Sherlock led John to the building where Moran presumably selected as his vantage point.

They found Dobby on the roof of the building. The elf was savagely beating up a black-clad man, who was already unconscious, with a large, cast-iron skillet.

"You! Bad! Evil! Wizard!" Dobby screamed between the whacks.

"You! Murderer of! Winky! You-"

"Dobby- Dobby, that's enough!" said John, alarmed, as Sherlock took off the cloak. "You're going to kill him!"

Dobby stopped. Then he looked up at John with the skillet held above his head. His skinny arms trembled from the effort to keep it aloft.

"One more for Winky?" Dobby begged, fat tears rolling down his cheeks.

John thought about it for a moment.

"Just one," said John, raising a finger.

Dobby gave John a watery look of gratitude before hitting Moran's head with all his might. Then he let go of the dented skillet, which clattered to the floor, and blew his nose into his shirt.

"… Not good enough," Dobby mumbled. "Poor Winky…"

John reached down and patted the elf's head.

"Yeah, I agree and I'm sorry. But dead men tell no tales…"

Sherlock touched John's shoulder.

"We need to go," he said, pointing at the sky.

John looked up. Helicopters with their spotlights on were heading their way. Down below, a troop of cars and vans with flashing blue and red lights were fast approaching the building.

"Right. Dobby, take us out of here," said John.

May 24, 20XX, 9:45 PM

Harry Watson

ALIVE?! PLEASE RESPOND!

John? Sherlock?

?

May 24, 20XX, 10:34 PM

Harry Watson

Please…?

May 24, 20XX, 11:54 PM

Sherlock Holmes

Alive

SH

John Watson

We're all fine. Sorry. Mycroft made us relocate asap for security purposes

Harry Watson

T_T

TG ok

On May 25th, the morning after the final task of the Triwizard Tournament, Lestrade found himself in St. Mungo's with his children sans Ellen and Isaac. The witches and wizards waiting in the lobby with him were standing around the screen showing the MMN public news broadcast, which displayed a holograph of Minister Cornelius Fudge making an announcement.

"It is with great regret that I must confirm that the wizard styling himself Lord - well, you know who I mean - is alive and among us again," said Fudge, looking tired and flustered as he addressed his unseen audience. "It is with almost equal regret that we report Grandmaster Shin June Hu was attacked last night and is currently

in critical condition. We believe the attack was done under the direct orders of Lord - Thingy."

Fudge blathered about the Ministry publishing guides to elementary home and personal Defence, while urging the wizarding public to remain calm. Next to him, a record of Albus Dumbledore dueling LV started to play. Quite a few wizards whooped and applauded as they watched the battle, and several witches burst into tears.

"Daddy?" said Rupert.

"Mmm?" said Lestrade.

"Grandpa alright?" Rupert asked. He looked gravely concerned.

Lestrade swallowed the lump in his throat. The corners of his eyes prickled. He had to remind himself Robert was taking care of Shin, not some random guy from either St. Mungo's or a Muggle Hospital least he lose it.

"… Yeah," Lestrade said croakily. "Yeah, he'll be alright."

"But you're *sad*," Martin pointed out. Who knew he understood his grandfather was fighting for his life?

Then Lestrade remembered with a pang only Julia had any real right to call Shin 'grandpa'. His younger children weren't related to him, and Lestrade forfeit the right to call him family when he remarried. Yet Martin, Rupert and Elise never questioned who Shin was to them.

"Well, grandpa's old," Lestrade mumbled. "So I… do worry if he'll fall asleep and never wake up…"

Sometime later, Arthur and Molly Weasley, who graciously came to wait with Lestrade, took the kids so they could all grab a bite. Lestrade lingered behind, and stared helplessly at the door that separated him from the operating theatre.

"Don't die," Lestrade whispered. "You… you're the father I never got to have…"

It was late Friday night, and Molly Hooper had just collapsed into a chair. She then rubbed her tired eyes with the palm of her hands. Besides the large beetle buzzing idly inside its glass jar habitat, all was silent inside the lab.

A voice spoke.

"Hey."

Molly jumped and looked around. Her face softened when she recognised the voice's owner.

"Hey!" she said breathlessly. "Sorry, I didn't see you come in."

"That's alright, I understand," said Sirius Black, stepping out from the shadows. "Busy shift?"

Molly nodded wearily.

"I got called in to look at the people who got shot at King's yesterday. It was so sad… all of them were so young."

Sirius turned grim. "I see."

Then he pulled up a chair next to Molly and sat on it. Molly rested her head against him, and drew a wince from Sirius.

"Bruises still bothering you?" Molly asked, as she lifted her head up.

"No," said Sirius, wrapping an arm around Molly and gently pulling her back towards him. "They're healing nicely. And I'm done making bulletproof armour for Sherlock."

"Did it work?"

"Yep," said Sirius, looking elsewhere. "I need to thank you," he added in a rush. "All the stuff you taught me about bullet wounds, it really made a difference. It saved someone's life yesterday. You're amazing-"

Molly was quiet while Sirius babbled. Then she lifted her head and

looked at Sirius square in the eye.

"Sirius," said Molly. "What's this about?"

Sirius shut his mouth and met her eyes for a beat. Then he looked away and studied the beetle, which seemed to stare back at him with its wings flared.

"Listen," whispered Sirius. "I've… got stuff coming up. No," he added quickly when he saw Molly open her mouth from the corner of his eye, "This isn't me wanting to break up. If it were up to me, I'd be asking you if you want to ride an elephant and herd rhinos right now. But I've got stuff to do and it *dangerous.* All I can tell you is that the shooting at King's was a precursor."

Silence fell in the lab again. After a while, Sirius turned to face Molly again. He immediately felt like a villain and murderer when he saw Molly's shiny eyes.

"When are you coming back?" Molly whispered.

"I don't know," Sirius muttered.

"How will I know when you're back?" asked Molly.

"I'll call you," said Sirius earnestly. "I don't think it'll take long. Sherlock's on the case, you know how good he is."

Molly didn't look reassured.

"What if something happens to you?" she asked. "Will I ever know?"

Sirius wet his lips. How should he respond to this? Just imagining Molly waiting and wondering for days stretching to weeks made him want to throw up.

"I'll think of something," said Sirius, trying to sound lighthearted. "I've got too much to live for. I haven't ridden an elephant yet, for starters." He paused. "I'll put a spell on that beetle if you like. If it turns tiny and boring, that means something happened to me."

Molly let out a soft chuckled that sounded sad… so very sad.

"I guess you could, since you're a wizard…"

They looked at each other again. Then they both looked down.

"I know that beetle's not the one you caught in the greenhouse," Molly blurted. "You should've just told me what Sherlock did to it."

"Dammit," said Sirius, blinking rapidly. "I thought I did a convincing job making it look like the original. What tipped you off?"

"Nothing," said Molly, while wiping her eyes repeatedly. "I just… It's funny, but Sherlock sent me a late Christmas present - a beetle with funny markings around the eyes, pinned and beautifully framed. I guess he wanted to apologize for accidentally killing it."

Two days had passed since the shooting at King's. Shin June Hu was awake and studying his room's tiled ceiling as though he could divine the secrets of the universe from its patterns. Then the door opened and Albus Dumbledore stepped inside.

For while neither Dumbledore nor Shin said anything. They merely studied each other for a very long time.

It was Shin who broke the silence:

"Sorry, I didn't duck."

Dumbledore made a strange noise. Then his shoulders trembled as he withheld his laughter or some other emotion, one couldn't say which.

"As happy as I am to see you alive, I want to give you a sound beating for misleading me," Dumbledore said after regaining his composure.

Shin chuckled briefly and then winced.

"You should do it when I can't hit back," he rasped.

"It's tempting," said Dumbledore. "But I shall defer until you get

better."

"That won't be until another six months or a year," Shin grunted. "And I don't let people hit me if I can help it."

Dumbledore smiled sadly. Then he sat down on the nearby armchair.

There was another brief moment of silence.

"You knew Voldemort was after the prophecy," Shin said. "Surely you expected him to try to kill me to get it. Why else would you make a portkey that would take you directly to the Department of Mysteries?"

"I assumed you would do things my way," said Dumbledore.

"What gave you the idea?" Shin scoffed.

"My own presumptions, clearly," said Dumbledore. "I see now that you had your own ideas as far back as Sherlock's LV War Part II meeting. You knew one does not find Lord Voldemort unless he chooses to reveal himself. Therefore, as Mycroft Holmes said, the best way to make Voldemort reveal himself is to entice him to infiltrate the Ministry and stage an ambush. The main challenge of this plan is showing Voldemort, convincingly, that the security surrounding the Hall of Prophecy, which houses the record of the prophecy he obsessively desires to hear in full detail, is down."

Dumbledore looked at Shin.

" *You* are the security," he said. "As long as you are alive and well, and he has followers to order, Lord Voldemort will not risk breaking into the Department of Mysteries in person. However, if most of his Death Eaters are *not* available, and he had a feasible way in which to kill you, Voldemort won't hesitate to order your assassination and then infiltrate the Ministry himself. Also, if I witnessed your death, there is a strong chance that I'll become angry enough to go and confront Voldemort myself and kill him. Thus Sherlock conceived and executed a plan that would incarcerate all of his legally free Death Eaters. In the meantime, you prepared for Moran to

assassinate you… with cameras ready to record and broadcast your 'death'."

Shin said nothing.

"I admit this scheme has a subtle brilliance to it," Dumbledore went on. "It certainly worked, for the most part. However, you of all people should know that getting shot is a deadly risk, especially - please pardon the phrase - someone your age."

"A famous author once wrote inside every older person is younger person wondering what happened; this is certainly true for me," said Shin. Then he sighed. "But yes, you are right and I'm sorry. I knew the plan was selfish and risky. The bullet could've killed me. There was no guarantee you would work out what my death would mean at the heat of the moment. Even if you did, Voldemort may have taken the prophecy's record before you reached him. Above all, how dare I trick you into killing him? Why would someone like you violate your principles and murder someone in cold-blood? But the thought of sparing war to my children and grandchildren was…"

"… a temptation so great, you thought no sacrifice was too great to pay," Dumbledore finished. "Yes, I understand."

There was another bout of silence.

"I can't help anymore," said Shin regretfully.

"You've helped enough," said Dumbledore gently. "Rest well, my friend."

Dumbledore stood up. That moment, the door flew open and Shin's children barged in.

"APPA, WHAT THE FREAK!?" Jeremy roared, eyes overflowing.

"You said you're taking care of it!" shouted Jason through tears and a snotty nose. "How is *this* taking care?!"

"You could've *died* !" Jacqueline cried between sobs.

"Why are you crying?" Shin snarled, pointing a finger at his sons and

daughter and somehow halting them in their tracks. "I'm not dead! Now suck those tears back up!"

They sniffled.

" *All the way!* "

They sniffled more loudly.

"Can we hug you now?" Jacqueline asked. Her voice was wobbly and her face was still wet.

Shin let out a gusting sigh, full of irritation.

" *Fine* ."

The three promptly flung themselves at Shin, Jason sobbing the loudest.

Dumbledore watched the four for a lingering moment. Then, without another word, he quietly slipped away.

Voldemort looked down at the ruins of Azkaban before him. His Death Eaters, previously incarcerated in the stone prison, groveled all around him at his feet. A bit further back, hundreds of Dementors stood by, blocking the other prisoners from leaving the wreckage. Most of them were huddled in a corner, practically comatose due to the Dementors' influence, but some attempted to crawl away, and yet some others begged Voldemort to save them.

One of the latter was a squat little woman. Her short mousy hair was tangled and sported many bald patches. Her pouchy eyes were sunken into the sockets of her broad skull, which had toad-like skin stretched over it.

"Take me with you," she begged. "I can help."

Voldemort regarded the woman through his pitiless eyes. Then he laughed… a terrible sound that left everyone cowering in fright.

"You think you can help me?" said Voldemort. "Me, the greatest of all wizard-kind? Me, who has the blood of Slytherin himself running through his veins? *You*, who is so incompetent that you botched even the simplest of tasks and nearly led the Ministry of Magic to ruin?"

Then he pointed his wand at the woman. She was shoved back inside the fortress, like an invisible hand had pushed her, and the rubble gathered up around her and sealed her in.

"Toads need not apply," Voldemort sneered. "Now come, my Death Eaters…"

The last evening at school arrived. Most people had finished packing and were already heading down to the end-of-term feast, but Harry had not even started.

"Just do it tomorrow!" said Ron, who was waiting by the door of their dormitory. "Come on, I'm starving."

"I won't be long… look, you go ahead…"

But when the dormitory door closed behind Ron, Harry made no effort to speed up his packing. The very last thing he wanted to do was to attend the Leaving Feast. He worried what Dumbledore would say at his year-end speech. Surely he would mention Voldemort's return… Harry didn't want to hear it. He heard enough about Voldemort.

All week Zing/MMN regaled its viewers with 24-7 coverage on Voldemort: how he infiltrated the Ministry of Magic; how he partially destroyed Azkaban the day after, and left with all his incarcerated Death Eaters and the Dementors; his activities (and atrocities) from the past; reruns of Dumbledore's battle against Voldemort; there was even a documentary on guns and how Moran used a rifle to critically wound Mr. Shin. As if that wasn't exhausting enough, many students tried to make him talk about Voldemort. Some wanted to praise him for correctly guessing Voldemort's return months before the Ministry, others wanted to hear how he figured it out in

excruciating detail, and yet others demanded what *he* was going to do about it, since LV was a personal problem of his… surely he had a plan! Harry had never been more grateful for his friends, particularly Hermione, who firmly (and politely) told them all to piss off.

The common room was empty by the time Harry finished throwing his things haphazardly into his trunk, and he lumbered down the spiral staircase. He slowly made his way to the portrait hole, out and off to the corridor, ignoring the Fat Lady, who called after him: "The feast is about to start, you know, you're cutting it very fine!"

But Harry had no intention of going to the feast. Seeing *people* and listening to their talk was the last thing he wanted. As Harry wondered where he should go instead, he looked down at the Fat Lady's corridor and saw somebody who had long, scraggy blonde hair fastening a note to a board on the wall. A second glance showed him it was Luna Lovegood.

Harry honestly didn't know how to react to Luna. On the one hand, her eavesdropping initiated a chain-reaction of events that ended in Voldemort's return and Winky's death. On the other hand, Luna had no idea what was going on. And yet… what would've happened if she hadn't been there at the Music Room the night Remus received the werewolf treatment? What would've happened if she never mentioned her eavesdropping to Hermione? It hurt his mind and heart to think of the possibilities.

"Hello," said Luna vaguely, glancing around at him as she stepped back from the notice.

"Hi," said Harry. "What are you doing? How come you're not at the feast?"

"Well, I've lost most of my possessions," said Luna serenely. "People take them and hide them, you know. But as it's the last night, I really do need them back, so I've been putting up signs."

She gestured towards the noticeboard, upon which, sure enough, she had pinned a list of all her missing books and clothes, with a plea for their return.

An odd feeling rose in Harry. It was a few moments before he realized that he was feeling sorry for Luna.

"Why would anyone do that?" asked Harry, frowning.

"Oh… well…" she shrugged. "I think they think I'm a bit odd, you know. Some people call me 'Loony' Lovegood, actually."

Harry looked at her and the new feeling of pity intensified rather painfully.

"That's not right," he said flatly. "Do you want help finding them?"

"Oh, no," Luna said, smiling at him. "They'll come back. They always do in the end. It was just that I wanted to pack tonight. Anyway, why aren't you at the feast?"

Harry shrugged. "Just didn't feel like it."

"No," said Luna, observing him with her oddly misty, protuberant eyes. "I don't suppose you do. A lot people have been saying insensitive things lately, ever since the Ministry admitted You-Know-Who is back. Someone in my dorm said we should hire Muggle soldiers to kill him since guns are powerful enough to defeat Grandmaster Shin. A few of them might die, of course, but it'll be worth it."

Harry nodded curtly. He'd overheard similar arguments from his fellow students himself. Those same students also complained whenever the Zing/MMN news broadcast talked about the Muggle victims who died because of Moran. They weren't interested in Muggle news, they said. They wanted to know what the Ministry or Dumbledore was doing about the You-Know-Who problem. It was as if they thought Voldemort was a pesky infestation of vermin, and didn't pause to think someone, somewhere was grieving over their lost wife, husband, mother, father, son or daughter… like the Muggles weren't real people too…

"What'd you think of the idea?" Harry asked.

"I thought it was horrible and I said so," said Luna.

"That was good of you."

"Thank you," said Luna, smiling vaguely. "I'm glad you say so. She and her friends just laughed in my face."

Harry sighed. "Are you sure you don't want me to help you look for your stuff?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said Luna. "No, I think I'll just go down and have some pudding and wait for it all to turn up… it always does in the end. Well, have a nice holiday, Harry."

"Yeah… yeah, you too."

She walked away from him and, as he watched her go, Harry found that the terrible weight in his chest seemed to have lessened slightly.

Harry didn't go to the feast. Instead he walked all the way to the lake, sat down on its bank, sheltered from the gaze of any possible passersby behind a tangle of shrubs, and stared out over the gleaming water, thinking…

Perhaps the reason he wanted to be alone was because he had felt isolated from everybody since he returned from the Department of Mysteries. An invisible barrier separated him from the rest of the world. Unlike other people, he didn't the option of running away or hiding. Voldemort would not rest until he killed Harry or got himself killed. In short, he, Harry, was a marked man.

A terrible weight of grief and despair dragged at him whenever he thought about what this meant. Every action he took had magnified consequences; just look at how he botched up his first big case and led Winky to her death. Also, anyone helpful to him was in grave danger. Mr. Shin would've never thought to risk his life and friendship with Dumbledore - the only other man who had the power to kill Voldemort - in hopes to spare his family pain and death if he never met Harry. Voldemort might hold his friends hostage. He already tried to murder John and Sherlock. Benedict was so traumatized by the shooting, John temporarily relocated to Yorkshire, at Sherlock's parents' home, where the chances of him

hearing sharp noises were minimal. Harry would never forgive himself if his baby brother was left permanently scarred by the incident.

Harry sat there for a long time, gazing out at the water, trying not to think about his future. Because frankly it looked hopeless. He didn't have Sherlock's genius, Mycroft's resources, or the kind of power Voldemort had. Even if he had a hundred years to practice, he would never be as good. He also felt fury towards the people whose skills and gifts he envied, for it was because of such people-people like Voldemort, who thought himself above it all because he was more powerful and gifted than everyone else-that he got handed his burden in the first place. He also resented the fact he would have to rely on them, but what other choice did he have? He was just an ordinary person, forced to fight against titans…

Harry's phone rang just as the sun started setting. Harry hesitated for a beat before he connected the call. A holograph of Sherlock and John appeared.

"Hey babe," said John.

Harry said nothing. He felt his throat close up as he thought about the magnitude of danger he'd bring to the person he loved the most. Benedict deserved to have a safe childhood, with his own mother raising him. Anyway, Harry wasn't really…

"Shut up," said Sherlock, interrupting Harry's train of thought. "I know what you're thinking."

Harry looked down. He heard rather than saw John let out a sigh.

"Alright, you just listen," said John. "Do you remember what I told you when you blew up your room several years back?"

Harry drew a blank. He'd blown up various parts of 221B so many times over the years he lost count. In fact, he couldn't remember a time when he *wasn't* blowing something up.

"I said we don't care if you're a looney, an X-man-esque mutant or a criminal mastermind," said John. "From this day forth, you're my

son."

Harry swallowed. He remembered now… John had told him that the day Sherlock discovered his magic.

"In light of the current circumstances, Sherlock and I agreed there should be an addendum," John continued. "Now listen carefully, we put a lot of thought into it: we don't care if the entire wizarding world goes against you, Sherlock thinks you're boring- he doesn't by the way- and Mycroft declares you an enemy of state. *You're still our son* ."

Harry bit back a sob. His vision turned blurry.

"Since you're our son, we have no intention of sitting back and let a magical psychopath murder you," John declared. "That's final. No negotiations. So if I don't see you at platform nine and three quarters tomorrow, I'll…"

"Okay, okay!" said Harry, wiping his face on his sleeve, more relieved than any words could say. "I'll be there… I wasn't planning on anything…"

"Wrong," said Sherlock, smirking. "Still lying like a beginner…"

"What the heck are you teaching him?" John demanded. Then she smiled at Harry. "See you tomorrow."

Harry said bye and ended the call. Then he got up and returned to the castle, smiling.

Perhaps it was hopeless. Perhaps he wasn't good enough. But he wasn't alone.

Final Notes : Thus ends A Study in Magic . A wimp I may be, I couldn't escape the logic/fact/reality that all the planning and preparation in the world can't spare you from debilitating injuries, especially when you incur them deliberately.

You can't go this long writing HP/Sherlock fanfic without quoting

another famous British author. I speak, of course, of Terry Pratchett. Can you find it? ;)

PSA: the latest installment of A Study In Magic, **LIARS FOR MAGIC**, is up. This is a fully transformed original work (but set in the ASIM universe). You can find links at: **booksofchange dot com**

I've taken down the PSA chapter since it's not really a chapter (hard to send alerts on this site).

ASIM WILL STAY UP for now. The ebooks are still available on my website.